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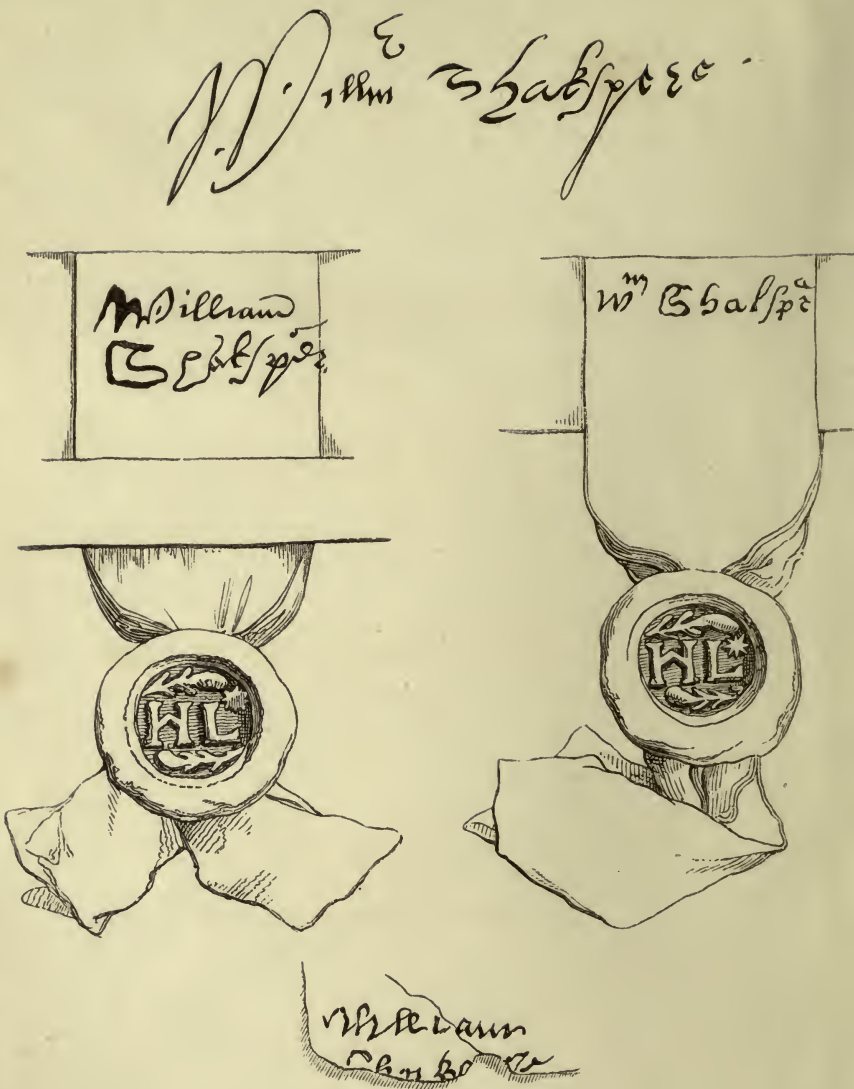

WILLIAM SHAKSPERE,

A BIOGRAPHY.

FORMING A COMPANION VOLUME

TO THE

NATIONAL EDITION OF THE PICTORIAL SHAKSPERE.

BY CHARLES KNIGHT.

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CHARLES KNIGHT, FLEET STREET.

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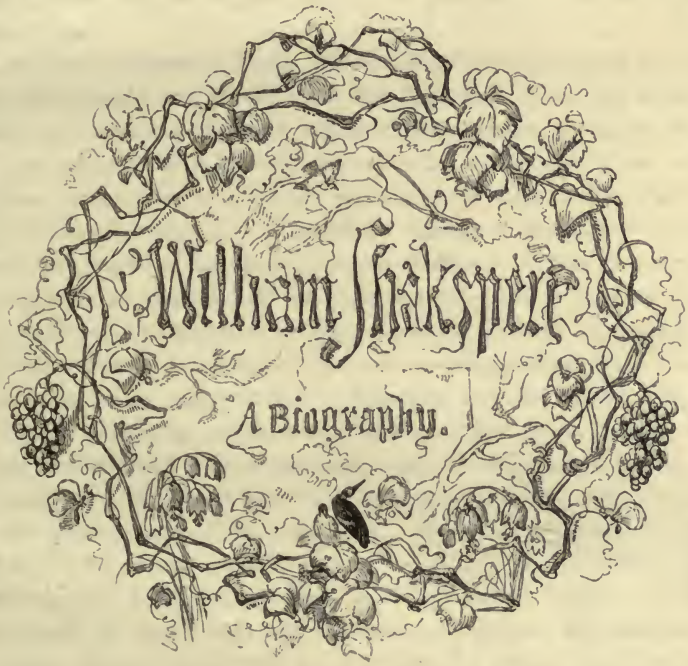

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ADVERTISEMENT.

This is a re-publication, with many alterations of arrangement, and some modifications of opinion grounded upon new information, of a volume published in 1843. That book has been long out of print; and it is a gratification to me to re-produce it in a cheap form.

In the original advertisement I said, "Every Life of Shakspere must, to a certain extent, be conjectural; and all the Lives that have been written are conjectural. This 'Biography' is only so far more conjectural than any other, as regards the form which it assumes, by which it has been endeavoured to associate Shakspere with the circumstances around him, in a manner which may fix them in the mind of the reader by exciting his interest." I quoted the opinion of Steevens—"All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakspere is, that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon—married, and had children there—went to London, where he commenced actor and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried." I pointed out that this was exaggeration, but I somewhat hastily termed it "slight exaggeration." I fully agree with Mr. Hunter, with regard to the want of information on the life of Shakspere, that he is, in this respect, in the state in which most of his contemporary poets are—Spenser for instance—but with this difference, that we do know more concerning Shakspere than we know of most of his contemporaries of the same class. Admitting this sound reasoning, I still believe that the attempt which I ventured to make, for the first time in English Literature, to write a Biography which, in the absence of Diaries and Letters, should surround the known facts with the local and temporary circumstances, and with the social relations amidst which one of so defined a position must have moved, was not a freak of fancy—a "Burlesque" as one critic has been pleased to call it,—but an approximation to the truth, which could not have been reached by a mere documentary narrative. I venture to think that I have made the course of Shakspere clear and consistent, without any extravagant theories, and with some successful resistance to long received prejudices. If there were faults of taste in the original attempt, I have endeavoured to correct them, in this edition, to the best of my judgment.

CHARLES KNIGHT.

March 1, 1850.

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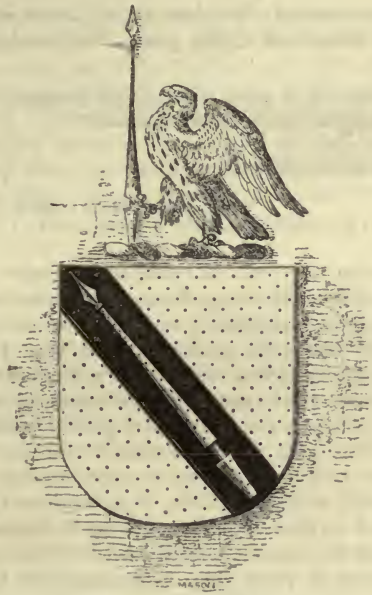
[Infant Shakspere.]

BOOK I.



[Arms of John Shakspere.]

CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY.

On the 22nd of August, 1485, there was a battle fought for the crown of England, a short battle ending in a decisive victory. In that field a crowned king, "manfully fighting in the middle of his enemies, was slain and brought to his death;" and a politic adventurer put on the crown, which the immediate descendants of his house wore for nearly a century and a quarter. The battle-field was Bosworth. Two months afterwards the Earl of Richmond was more solemnly crowned and anointed at Westminster by the name of King Henry VII.; and "after this," continues the chronicler, "he began to remember his especial friends and fautors, of whom some he advanced to honour and dignity, and some he enriched with possessions and goods, every man according to his desert and merit." * Was there in that victorious army of the Earl of Richmond,—which Richard denounced as a "company of traitors, thieves, outlaws, and runagates,"—an Englishman bearing the name of Chacksper, or Shakespeyre, or Schakespere, or Schakespeire, or Shakespeyre, or Schakspere, or Shakespere, or Shakspere,†—a martial name, however spelt? "Breakspear, Shakespear, and the like, have been surnames imposed upon the first bearers of them for valour and feats of arms." ‡ Of the warlike achievements of

* Hall's Chronicle.

† A list of the brethren and sisters of the Guild of Knowle, near Rowington, in Warwickshire, exhibits a great number of the name of Shakspere in that fraternity, from about 1460 to 1527; and the names are spelt with the diversity here given, *Shakspere* being the latest.

‡ Verstegan's "Restitution," &c.

this Shakspere there is no record: his name or his deeds would have no interest for us unless there had been born, eighty years after this battle-day, a direct descendant from him—

> "Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,
> Doth like himself *heroically sound*;"*—

a Shakspere, of whom it is also said—

> "He seems *to shake a lance*
> As brandish'd at the eyes of ignorance."†

A public document, bearing the date of 1599, affirms, upon "credible report," of "John Shakspere, now of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gentleman," that his "parent, great-grandfather, and late antecessor, for his faithful and approved service to the late most prudent prince King Henry VII. of famous memory, was advanced and rewarded with lands and tenements, given to him in those parts of Warwickshire, where they have continued by some descents in good reputation and credit." Such is the recital of a grant of arms to John Shakspere, the father of William Shakspere, which document refers to "his ancient coat of arms, heretofore assigned to him, whilst he was her Majesty's officer and bailiff of Stratford." In those parts of Warwickshire, then, lived and died, we may assume, the faithful and approved servant of the "unknown Welshman," as Richard called him, who won for himself the more equivocal name of "the most prudent prince." He was probably advanced in years when Henry ascended the throne; for in the first year of Queen Elizabeth, 1558, his great-grandson, John Shakspere, was a burgess of the corporation of Stratford, and was in all probability born about 1530. The family had continued in those parts, we are assured, "by some descents;" but how they were occupied in the business of life, what was their station in society, how they branched out into other lines of Shaksperes, we have no distinct record. The name may be traced by legal documents in many parishes of Warwickshire; but we learn from a deed of trust executed in 1550, by Robert Arden, the maternal grandfather of William Shakspere, that Richard Shakspere was the occupier of land in Snitterfield, the property of Robert Arden. At this parish of Snitterfield lived a Henry Shakspere, who as we learn from a declaration in the Court of Record at Stratford, was the brother of John Shakspere.‡ It is conjectured, and very reasonably, that Richard Shakspere, of Snitterfield, was the paternal grandfather of William Shakspere. Snitterfield is only three miles distant from Stratford. They probably were cultivators of the soil, unambitious small proprietors.

Harrison, a painter of manners who comes near the time of John Shakspere, has described the probable condition of his immediate ancestors: "Yeomen are those which by our law are called *legales homines*, free men born English. . . . . The truth is, that the word is derived from the Saxon term zeoman, or geoman, which signifieth (as I have read) a settled or staid man. . . . . This sort of people have a certain pre-eminence and more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers."

But the grant of arms in 1599, opens another branch of inquiry into Shakspere's ancestry. It says, "for that the said John Shakespere having married the daughter and one of the heirs of Robert Arden of Wellingcote, [Wilmecote] and also produced this his ancient coat of arms, we [the heralds] have likewise upon one other escutcheon impaled the same with the ancient arms of the said Arden of Welling-

* Spenser. † Ben Jonson.
‡ See Halliwell's "Life of Shakspere," p. 8, and Collier's "Life," p. 62.

cote." They add that John Shakspere, and his children, issue, and posterity, may bear and use the same shield of arms, single or impaled.

The family of Arden was one of the highest antiquity in Warwickshire. Dugdale traces its pedigree uninterruptedly up to the time of Edward the Confessor. Under the head of Curdworth, a parish in the hundred of Hemlingford, he says—"In this place I have made choice to speak historically of that most ancient and worthy family, whose surname was first assumed from their residence in this part of the country, then and yet called Arden, by reason of its woodiness, the old Britons and Gauls using the word in that sense." At the time of the Norman invasion there resided at Warwick, Turchil, "a man of especial note and power" and of "great possessions." In the Domesday Book his father, Alwyne, is styled *vice comes*. Turchil, as well as his father, received favour at the hands of the Conqueror. He retained the possession of vast lands in the shire, and he occupied Warwick Castle as a military governor. He was thence called Turchil de Warwick by the Normans. But Dugdale goes on to say—"He was one of the first here in England that, in imitation of the Normans, assumed a surname, for so it appears that he did, and wrote himself *Turchillus de Eardene*, in the days of King William Rufus." The history of the De Ardens, as collected with wonderful industry by Dugdale, spreads over six centuries. Such records seldom present much variety of incident, however great and wealthy be the family to which they are linked. In this instance a shrievalty or an attainder varies the register of birth and marriage, but generation after generation passes away without leaving any enduring traces of its sojourn on the earth. Fuller has not the name of a single De Arden amongst his "Worthies"—men illustrious for something more than birth or riches,—with the exception of those who swell the lists of sheriffs for the county. The pedigree which Dugdale gives of the Arden family brings us no nearer in the direct line to the mother of Shakspere than to Robert Arden, her great-grandfather: he was the third son of Walter Arden, who married Eleanor, the daughter of John Hampden, of Buckinghamshire; and he was brother to Sir John Arden, squire for the body to Henry VII. Malone, with laudable industry, has continued the pedigree in the younger branch. Robert's son, also called Robert, was groom of the chamber to Henry VII. He appears to have been a favourite; for he had a valuable lease granted him by the king of the manor of Yoxsall, in Staffordshire, and was also made keeper of the royal park of Aldercar. Robert Arden, the groom of the chamber, probably left the court upon the death of his master. He married, and he had a son, also Robert, who had a family of seven daughters. The youngest was Mary, the mother of William Shakspere.

From the connection of these immediate ancestors of Shakspere's mother with the court of Henry VII., Malone has assumed that they were the "antecessors"* of John Shakspere declared to have been advanced and rewarded by the conqueror of Bosworth Field. Because Robert Arden had a lease of the royal manor of Yoxsall, in Staffordshire, Malone also contends that the reward of lands and tenements stated in the grant of arms to have been bestowed upon the ancestor of John Shakspere really means the beneficial lease to Robert Arden. He holds that *popularly* the grandfather of Mary Arden would have been called the grandfather of John Shakspere, and that John Shakspere himself would have so called him. The answer is very direct. The grant of arms recites that the *great*-grandfather of John Shakspere had been advanced and rewarded by Henry VII., and then *goes on to say* that John

* In a draft of the grant of arms, dated 1596, there are several variations from that of 1599. Amongst others we have,—"whose parents and late antecessors were for this valiant and faithful service" instead of "parent, great-grandfather, and late antecessor, for his faithful and approved service," &c.

Shakspere had married the daughter of Robert Arden of Wellingcote: He has an ancient coat-of-arms of his own derived from his ancestor, and the arms of his wife are to be impaled with these his own arms. Can the interpretation of this document then be that Mary Arden's grandfather is the person pointed out as John Shakspere's *great*-grandfather; and that, having an ancient coat-of-arms himself, his ancestry is really that of his wife, whose arms are totally different?

Mary Arden! The name breathes of poetry. It seems the personification of some Dryad of

> "Many a huge-grown wood, and many a shady grove,"

called by that generic name of Arden,—a forest with many towns,

> "Whose footsteps yet are found,
> In her rough woodlands more than any other ground,
> That mighty Arden held even in her height of pride,
> Her one hand touching Trent, the other Severn's side."*

High as was her descent, wealthy and powerful as were the numerous branches of her family, Mary Arden, we doubt not, led a life of usefulness as well as innocence, within her native forest hamlet. Her father died in December, 1556. His will is dated the 24th of November in the same year, and the testator styles himself "Robert Arden, of Wylmcote, in the paryche of Aston Cauntlow."

[Village of Wilmecote.]

The face of the country must have been greatly changed in three centuries. A canal, with lock rising upon lock, now crosses the hill upon which the village stands; but traffic has not robbed the place of its green pastures and its shady nooks, though nothing is left of the ancient magnificence of the great forest. There is very slight

* Drayton. "Polyolbion," 13th Song.

appearance of antiquity about the present village, and certainly not a house in which we can conceive that Robert Arden resided.

It was in the reign of Philip and Mary that Robert Arden died; and we cannot therefore be sure that the wording of his will is any absolute proof of his religious opinions:—"First, I bequeath my soul to Almighty God and to our blessed Lady Saint Mary, and to all the holy company of heaven, and my body to be buried in the churchyard of Saint John the Baptist in Aston aforesaid." Mary, his youngest daughter, occupies the most prominent position in the will:—"I give and bequeath to my youngest daughter Mary all my land in Wilmecote, called Asbies, and the crop upon the ground, sown and tilled as it is, and six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence of money to be paid over ere my goods be divided." To his daughter Alice he bequeaths the third part of all his goods, moveable and unmoveable, in field and town: to his wife Agnes (the step-mother of his children) six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence, under the condition that she should allow his daughter Alice to occupy half of a copyhold at Wilmecote, the widow having her "jointure in Snitterfield." The remainder of his goods is divided amongst his other children. Alice and Mary are made the "full executors" to his will. We thus see that the youngest daughter has an undivided estate and a sum of money; and the crop was also bequeathed to her. The estate consisted of fifty-six acres of arable and pasture, and a house. But she also possessed some property in Snitterfield, which had probably been secured to her upon her father's second marriage. It was in Snitterfield that Richard Shakspere occupied part of the Arden property.

Some twenty years after the death of Robert Arden, Harrison described the growth of domestic luxury in England, saying, "There are old men yet dwelling in the village where I remain, which have noted three things to be marvellously altered in England within their sound remembrance." One of these enormities is the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas formerly each one made his fire against a reredosse in the hall, where he dined and dressed his meat: the second thing is the great amendment of lodging—the pillows, the beds, the sheets, instead of the straw pallet, the rough mat, the good round log or the sack of chaff under the head: the third thing is the exchange of vessels, as of treen platters into pewter, and wooden spoons into silver or tin. He then describes the altered splendour of the substantial farmer: "A fair garnish of pewter on his cupboard, with so much more in odd vessels going about the house; three or four feather-beds; so many coverlids and carpets of tapestry; a silver salt, a bowl for wine, and a dozen of spoons to furnish up the suit." Robert Arden had certainly not a mansion filled with many needless articles for use or ornament. In the inventory of his goods taken after his death we find table-boards, forms, cushions, benches, and one cupboard in his hall; there are painted cloths [pictures] in the hall and in the chamber; seven pair of sheets, five board-cloths, and three towels; there is one feather-bed and two mattresses, with sundry coverlets, and articles called canvasses, three bolsters, and one pillow. The kitchen boasts four pans, four pots, four candlesticks, a basin, a chafing-dish, two cauldrons, a frying-pan, and a gridiron. And yet this is the grandson of a groom of a king's bedchamber, an office filled by the noble and the rich, and who, in the somewhat elevated station of a gentleman of worship, would probably possess as many conveniences and comforts as a rude state of society could command. There was plenty outdoors—oxen, bullocks, kine, weaning calves, swine, bees, poultry, wheat in the barns, barley, oats, hay, peas, wood in the yard, horses, colts, carts, ploughs. Robert Arden had lived through unquiet times, when there was little accumulation, and men thought rather of safety than of indulgence: the days of security were at hand. Then came the luxuries that Harrison looked upon with much astonishment and some little heartburning.

And so in the winter of 1556 was Mary Arden left without the guidance of a father. We learn from a proceeding in chancery some forty years later, that with the land of Asbies there went a messuage. Mary Arden had therefore a roof-tree of her own. Her sister Alice was to occupy another property in Wilmecote with the widow. Mary Arden lived in a peaceful hamlet; but there were some strange things around her,—incomprehensible things to a very young woman. When she went to the church of Aston Cantlow, she now heard the mass sung, and saw the beads bidden; whereas a few years before there was another form of worship within those walls. She learnt, perhaps, of mutual persecutions and intolerance, of neighbour warring against neighbour, of child opposed to father, of wife to husband. She might have beheld these evils. The rich religious houses of her county and vicinity had been suppressed, their property scattered, their chapels and fair chambers desecrated, their very walls demolished. The new power was trying to restore them, but, even if it could have brought back the old riches, the old reverence had passed away. In that solitude she probably mused upon many things with an anxious heart. The wealthier Ardens of Kingsbury and Hampton, of Rotley and Rodburne and Park Hall, were her good cousins; but bad roads and bad times perhaps kept them separate. And so she lived a somewhat lonely life, till a young yeoman of Stratford, whose family were her father's tenants, came to sit oftener and oftener upon the wooden benches in the old hall—a substantial yeoman, a burgess of the corporation in 1557 or 1558; and then in due season, perhaps in the very year when Romanism was lighting its last fires in England, and a queen was dying with "Calais" written on her heart, Mary Arden and John Shakspere were, in all likelihood, standing before the altar of the parish church of Aston Cantlow, and the house and lands of Asbies became administered by one who took possession "by the right of the said Mary," who thenceforward abided for half a century in the good town of Stratford. There is no register of the marriage discovered: but the date must have been about a year after the father's death; for "Joan Shakspere, daughter to John Shakspere," was, according to the Stratford register, baptized on the 15th September, 1558.

[Church of Aston Cantlow.]

[Clopton's Bridge.]

CHAPTER II.

STRATFORD.

A PLEASANT place is this quiet town of Stratford—a place of ancient traffic, "the name having been originally occasioned from the *ford* or passage over the water upon the great *street* or road leading from Henley in Arden towards London."* England was not always a country of bridges: rivers asserted their own natural rights, and were not bestrid by domineering man. If the people of Henley in Arden would travel towards London, the Avon might invite or oppose their passage at his own good will; and, indeed, the river so often swelled into a rapid and dangerous stream, that the honest folk of the one bank might be content to hold somewhat less intercourse with their neighbours on the other than Englishmen now hold with the antipodes. But the days of improvement were sure to arrive. There were charters for markets, and charters for fairs, obtained from King Richard and King John; and in process of time Stratford could shew in a wooden bridge, though without a causey, and exposed to constant damage by flood. And then an alderman of London,—in days when the very rich were not slow to do magnificent things for public benefit, and did less for their own vain pride and luxury,—built a stone bridge over the Avon, which has borne the name of Clopton's Bridge, even from the days of Henry VII. until this day. Ecclesiastical foundations were numerous at Stratford; and such were, in every case, the centres of civilization and prosperity. The parish church was a collegiate one, with a chantry of five priests; and there was an ancient guild and chapel of the Holy Cross, partly a religious and partly a civil institution. A grammar-school was connected with the guild; and the muni-

* Dugdale.

cipal government of the town was settled in a corporation by charter of Edward VI., and the grammar-school especially maintained. Here then was a liberal accumulation, such as belongs only to an old country, to make a succession of thriving communities at Stratford; and they did thrive, according to the notion of thrift in those days. But we are not to infer that when John Shakspere removed the daughter and heiress of Arden from the old hall of Wilmcote he placed her in some substantial mansion in his corporate town, ornamental as well as solid in its architecture, spacious, convenient, fitted up with taste, if not with splendour. Stratford had, in all likelihood, no such houses to offer; it was a town of wooden houses, a scattered town,—no doubt with gardens separating the low and irregular tenements, sleeping ditches intersecting the properties, and stagnant pools exhaling in the road. A zealous antiquarian has discovered that John Shakspere inhabited a house in Henley Street as early as 1552; and that he, as well as two other neighbours, was fined for making a dung-heap in the street.* In 1553, the jurors of Stratford present certain inhabitants as violators of the municipal laws: from which presentment we learn that ban-dogs were not to go about unmuzzled; nor sheep pastured in the ban-croft for more than an hour each day; nor swine to feed on the common land unringed.† It is evident that Stratford was a rural town, surrounded with common fields, and containing a mixed population of agriculturists and craftsmen. The same character was retained as late as 1618, when the privy council represented to the corporation of Stratford that great and lamentable loss had "happened to that town by casualty of fire, which, of late years, hath been very frequently occasioned by means of thatched cottages, stacks of straw, furzes, and such-like combustible stuff, which are suffered to be erected and made confusedly in most of the principal parts of the town without restraint."‡

The population of the corporate town of Stratford, containing within itself rich endowments and all the framework of civil superiority, would appear insignificant in a modern census. The average annual number of baptisms in 1564 was fifty-five; of burials in the same year forty-two: these numbers, upon received principles of calculation, would give us a total population of about one thousand four hundred. In a certificate of charities, &c., in the thirty-seventh year of Henry VIII., the number of "housclyng people" in Stratford is stated to be fifteen hundred. This population was furnished with all the machinery by which Englishmen, even in very early times, managed their own local affairs, and thus obtained that aptitude for practical good government which equally rejects the tyranny of the one or of the many. The corporation in the time of John Shakspere consisted of fourteen aldermen and fourteen burgesses, one of the aldermen being annually elected to the office of bailiff. The bailiff held a court of record every fortnight, for the trial of all causes within the jurisdiction of the borough in which the debt and damages did not amount to thirty pounds. There was a court-leet also, which appointed its ale-tasters, who presided over the just measure and wholesome quality of beer, that necessary of life in ancient times; and which court-leet chose also, annually, four affeerors, who had the power in their hands of summary punishment for offences for which no penalty was prescribed by statute. The constable was the great police officer, and he was a man of importance, for the burgesses of the corporation invariably served the office. John Shakspere appears from the records of Stratford to have gone through the whole regular course of municipal duty. In 1556 he was on the jury of the court-leet; in 1557, an ale-taster; in 1558, a burgess; in 1559, a

* Hunter: "New Illustrations," vol. i. p. 18.

† The proceedings of the court are given in Mr. Halliwell's "Life of Shakespeare,"—a book which may be fairly held to contain all the documentary evidence of this life which has been discovered.

‡ Chalmers's "Apology," p. 618.

constable ; in 1560, an affeeror ; in 1561, a chamberlain ; in 1565, an alderman ; and in 1568, high bailiff of the borough, the chief magistrate.

There have been endless theories, old and new, as to the worldly calling of John Shakspere. There are ancient registers in Stratford, minutes of the Common Hall, proceedings of the Court-leet, pleas of the Court of Record, writs, which have been hunted over with unwearied diligence, and yet they tell us little of John Shakspere ; and what they tell us is too often obscure. When he was elected an alderman in 1565, we can trace out the occupations of his brother aldermen, and readily come to the conclusion that the municipal authority of Stratford was vested, as we may naturally suppose it to have been, in the hands of substantial tradesmen, brewers, bakers, butchers, grocers, victuallers, mercers, woollen-drapers.* Prying into the secrets of time, we are enabled to form some notion of the literary acquirements of this worshipful body. On rare, very rare occasions, the aldermen and burgesses constituting the town council affixed their signatures, for greater solemnity, to some order of the court ; and on the 29th of September, in the seventh of Elizabeth, upon an order that John Wheler should take the office of bailiff, we have nineteen names subscribed, aldermen and burgesses. There is something in this document which suggests a motive higher than mere curiosity for calling up these dignitaries from their happy oblivion, saying to each, "Dost thou use to write thy name ? or hast thou a mark to thyself like an honest, plain-dealing man ?" Out of the nineteen six only can answer, "I thank God I have been so well brought up that I can write my name." We were reluctant to yield our assent to Malone's assertion that Shakspere's father had a mark to himself. The marks are not distinctly affixed to each name, in this document. But subsequent discoveries establish the fact that he used two marks—one, something like an open pair of compasses — the other, the common cross. Even half a century later, to write was not held indispensable by persons of some pretension. In Decker's "Wonder of a Kingdom," the following dialogue takes place between Gentili and Buzardo :

"*Gen.* What qualities are you furnished with ?
Buz. My education has been like a gentleman.
Gen. Have you any skill in song or instrument ?
Buz. As a gentleman should have ; I know all but play on none : I am no barber.
Gen. Barber ! no, sir. I think it. Are you a linguist ?
Buz. As a gentleman ought to be ; one tongue serves one head ; I am no pedlar, to travel countries.
Gen. What skill ha' you in horsemanship ?
Buz. As other gentlemen have ; I ha' rid some beasts in my time.
Gen. *Can you write and read then ?*
Buz. *As most of your gentlemen do ; my bond has been taken with my mark at it.'*

We must not infer that one who gave his bond with his mark at it, was necessarily ignorant of all literature. It was very common for an individual to adopt, in the language of Jack Cade, "a mark to himself," possessing distinctness of character, and almost heraldically alluding to his name or occupation. Many of these are like ancient merchants' marks ; and on some old deeds the mark of a landowner alienating property corresponds with the mark described in the conveyance as cut in the turf, or upon boundary stones, of unenclosed fields.

One of the aldermen of Stratford in 1565, John Wheler, is described in the town records as a yeoman. He must have been dwelling in Stratford, for we have seen that he was ordered to take the office of high bailiff, an office demanding a near and constant residence. We can imagine a moderate landed proprietor cultivating his

* See Malone's "Life of Shakspeare," Boswell's Malone, vol. ii., p. 77.

own soil, renting perhaps other land, seated in a house in the town of Stratford, such as it was in the middle of the sixteenth century, as conveniently as in a solitary grange several miles away from it. Such a proprietor, cultivator, yeoman, we consider John Shakspere to have been. In 1556, the year that Robert, the father of Mary Arden, died, John Shakspere was admitted at the court-leet to two copyhold estates in Stratford. The jurors of the leet present that George Turnor had alienated to John Shakspere and his heirs one tenement, with a garden and croft, and other premises in Grenehyll Street, held of the lord at an annual quit-rent; and John Shakspere, who is present in court and does fealty, is admitted to the same. The same jurors present that Edward West has alienated to John Shakspere one tenement and a garden adjacent in Henley Street, who is in the same way admitted, upon fealty done to the lord. Here then is John Shakspere, before his marriage, the purchaser of two copyholds in Stratford, both with gardens, and one with a croft, or small enclosed field.*

In 1570 John Shakspere is holding, as tenant under William Clopton, a meadow of fourteen acres, with its appurtenances, called Ingon, at the annual rent of eight pounds. When he married, the estate of Asbies, within a short ride of Stratford, came also into his possession; and so did some landed property at Snitterfield. With these facts before us, scanty as they are, can we reasonably doubt that John Shakspere was living upon his own land, renting the land of others, actively engaged in the business of cultivation, in an age when men of substance very often thought it better to take the profits direct than to share them with the tenant? In "A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale of this Realme of Englande," published in 1581,—a Dialogue once attributed to William Shakspere,—the knight says, speaking of his class, "many of us are enforced either to keep pieces of our own lands when they fall in our own possession, or to purchase some farm of other men's lands, and to store it with sheep or some other cattle, to help make up the decay in our revenues, and to maintain our old estate withal, and yet all is little enough."

The belief that the father of Shakspere was a small landed proprietor and cultivator, employing his labour and capital in various modes which grew out of the occupation of land, offers a better, because a more natural, explanation of the circumstances connected with the early life of the great poet than those stories which would make him of obscure birth and servile employments. Take old Aubrey's story, the shrewd learned gossip and antiquary, who survived Shakspere some eighty years:—"Mr. William Shakespear was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. His father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours that when he was a boy he exercised his father's trade; but when he killed a calf he would do it in high style, and make a speech. There was at that time another butcher's son in this town that was held not at all inferior to him for a natural wit, his acquaintance and coetanean, but died young." With an undoubting confidence in Aubrey, Dr. Farmer averred that, when he that killed the calf wrote—

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will,"†

the poet-butcher was thinking of *skewers?* Malone also held that he who, when a

* Malone, with the documents before him, treats this purchase as if it had been the mere assignment of a lease; and, Malone having printed the documents, no one who wrote about Shakspere previous to the publication of our "Biography," in 1843, deduced from them that Shakspere's father was necessarily a person of some substance before his marriage, a purchaser of property.

† "Hamlet," Act v. Sc. II.

boy, exercised his father's trade, has described the process of calf-killing with an accuracy which nothing but profound experience could give—

> "And as the butcher takes away the calf,
> And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strays,
> Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house;
> Even so, remorseless, have they borne him hence.
> And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
> Looking the way her harmless young one went,
> And can do nought but wail her darling's loss,
> Even so," &c.*

The story, however, has a variation. There was at Stratford, in the year 1693, a clerk of the parish church, eighty years old,—that is, he was three years old when William Shakspere died,—and he, pointing to the monument of the poet, with the pithy remark that he was the "best of his family," proclaimed to a member of one of the Inns of Court that "this Shakespeare was formerly in this town bound apprentice to a butcher, but that he ran from his master to London."† His father was a butcher, says Aubrey; he was apprentice to a butcher, says the parish clerk. Aubrey was picking up his gossip for his friend Anthony-a-Wood in 1680, and it is not very difficult to imagine that the identical parish clerk was his authority. That honest chronicler, old as he was, had forty years of tradition to deal with in this matter of the butcher's son and the butcher's apprentice; and the result of such glimpses into the thick night of the past is sensibly enough stated by Aubrey himself:—"What uncertainty do we find in printed histories! They either treading too near on the heels of truth, that they dare not speak plain; or else for want of intelligence (things being antiquated) become too obscure and dark."

Akin to the butcher's trade is that of the dealer in wool. It is upon the authority of Betterton, the actor, who, in the beginning of the last century, made a journey into Warwickshire to collect anecdotes relating to Shakspere, that Rowe tells us that John Shakspere was a dealer in wool:—"His family, as appears by the register and the public writings relating to that town, were of good figure and fashion there, and are mentioned as gentlemen. His father, who was a considerable dealer in wool, had so large a family, ten children in all, that, though he was his eldest son, he could give him no better education than his own employment." We are now peeping "through the blanket of the dark." But daylight is not as yet. Malone was a believer in Rowe's account; and he was confirmed in his belief by possessing a piece of stained glass, bearing the arms of the merchants of the staple, which had been removed from a window of John Shakspere's house in Henley Street. But, unfortunately for the credibility of Rowe, as then held, Malone made a discovery, as it is usual to term such glimpses of the past: "I began to despair of ever being able to obtain any certain intelligence concerning his trade; when, at length, I met with the following entry, in a very ancient manuscript, containing an account of the proceedings in the bailiff's court, which furnished me with the long sought-for information, and ascertains that the trade of our great poet's father was that of a *glover*;" "Thomas Siche de Arscotte in com. Wigorn. querit' versus *John Shakyspere* de Stretford, in com. Warwic. *Glover*, in plac. quod reddat ei oct. libras, &c." This Malone held to be decisive.

We give this record above as Malone printed it, not very correctly; and having seen the original, we maintained that the word was not *Glover*. Mr. Collier and Mr. Halliwell affirm that the word *Glo*, with the second syllable contracted, is glover; and we accept their interpretation. But we still hold to our original belief that he was, in 1556, a landed proprietor and an occupier of land; one who, although

* "Henry VI.," Part II. Act III. Sc. I. † "Traditionary Anecdotes of Shakespere."

sued as a glover on the 17th June of that year, was a suitor in the same court on the 19th November, in a plea against a neighbour for unjustly detaining eighteen quarters of barley. We still refuse to believe that John Shakspere, when he is described as a *yeoman* in after years, "had relinquished his *retail* trade," as Mr. Halliwell judges; or that his mark, according to the same authority, was emblematical of the glove-sticks used for stretching the cheveril for fair fingers. We have no confidence that he had stores in Henley Street of the treasures of Autolycus,—

"Gloves as sweet as damask roses."

We think, that butcher, dealer in wool, glover, may all be reconciled with our position, that he was a landed proprietor, occupying land. Our proofs are not purely hypothetical.

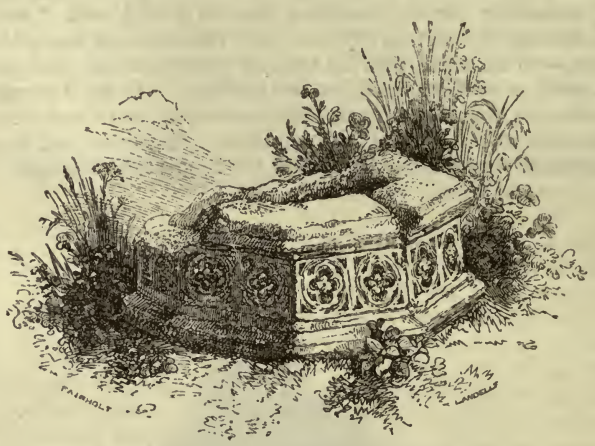
Harrison, who mingles laments at the increasing luxury of the farmer, with somewhat contradictory denouncements of the oppression of the tenant by the landlord, holds that the landlord is monopolizing the tenant's profits. His complaints are the natural commentary upon the social condition of England, described in "A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale:"—"Most sorrowful of all to understand, that men of great port and countenance are so far from suffering their farmers to have any gain at all, that *they themselves become* GRAZIERS, BUTCHERS, TANNERS, SHEEPMASTERS, WOODMEN, *and denique quid non*, thereby to enrich themselves, and bring all the wealth of the country into their own hands, leaving the commonalty weak, or as an idol with broken or feeble arms, which may in time of peace have a plausible show, but, when necessity shall enforce, have an heavy and bitter sequel." Has not Harrison solved the mystery of the *butcher;* explained the tradition of the *wool-merchant;* shewn how John Shakspere, the *woodman*, naturally sold a piece of timber to the corporation, which we find recorded; and, what is most difficult of credence, indicated how the *glover* is reconcilable with all these employments? We open an authentic record of this very period, and the solution of the difficulty is palpable: In John Strype's "Memorials Ecclesiastical under Queen Mary I," under the date of 1558, we find this passage: "It is certain that one Edward Horne suffered at Newent, where this Deighton had been, and spake with one or two of the same parish that did see him there burnt, and did testify that they knew the two persons that made the fire to burn him; they were two *glovers* or FELLMONGERS."* A fellmonger and a glover appear from this passage to have been one and the same. The fellmonger is he who prepares skins for the use of the leather-dresser, by separating the wool from the hide—the natural coadjutor of the sheep-master and the woolman. Shakspere himself implies that the glover was a manufacturer of skins: Dame Quickly asks of Slender's man, "Does he not wear a *great round* beard like a *glover's paring knife?*" The peltry is shaved upon a circular board, with a *great round* knife, to this day. The fellmonger's trade, as it now exists, and the trade in untanned leather, the glover's trade, would be so slightly different, that the generic term, glover, might be applied to each. There are few examples of the word "fellmonger" in any early writers. "Glover" is so common that it has become one of the universal English names derived from occupation,—far more common than if it merely applied to him who made coverings for the hands. At Coventry, in the middle of the sixteenth century, (the period of which we are writing) the *Glovers* and *Whittawers* formed one craft. A whittawer is one who prepares *tawed* leather—untanned leather—leather chiefly dressed from sheep skins and lamb skins by a simple process of soaking, and scraping, and liming, and softening by alum and salt. Of such were the large and coarse gloves in use in a rural district, even amongst

* Vol. v., p. 277—edit. 1816.

labourers; and such process might be readily carried on by one engaged in agricultural operations, especially when we bear in mind that the *white leather* was the especial leather of "husbandly furniture," as described by old Tusser.

We may reasonably persist, therefore, even in accord with "flesh and fell" tradition, in drawing the portrait of Shakspere's father, at the time of his marriage, in the free air,—on his horse, with his team, at market, at fair—and yet a dealer in carcases, or wood, or wool, or skins, his own produce. He was a proprietor of land, and an agriculturist, living in a peculiar state of society, as we shall see hereafter, in which the division of employments was imperfectly established, and the small rural capitalists strove to turn their own products to the greatest advantage.

[Snitterfield.]



[Ancient Font, formerly in Stratford Church.]

CHAPTER III.

THE REGISTER.

In the eleventh century the Norman Conqueror commanded a Register to be completed of the lands of England, with the names of their possessors, and the number of their free tenants, their villains, and their slaves. In the sixteenth century Thomas Cromwell, as the vicegerent of Henry VIII. for ecclesiastical jurisdiction, issued Injunctions to the Clergy, ordaining, amongst other matters, that every officiating minister shall, for every Church, keep a Book, wherein he shall register every Marriage, Christening, or Burial. In the different character of these two Registers we read what five centuries of civilization had effected for England. Instead of being recorded in the gross as *cotarii* or *servi*, the meanest labourer, his wife, and his children, had become children of their country and their country's religion, as much as the highest lord and his family. Their names were to be inscribed in a book and carefully preserved. But the people doubted the intent of this wise and liberal injunction. A friend of Cromwell writes to him, "There is much secret and several communications between the King's subjects; and [some] of them, in sundry places within the shires of Cornwall and Devonshire, be in great fear and mistrust what the King's Highness and his Council should mean, to give in commandment to the parsons and vicars of every parish that they should make a book, and surely to be kept, wherein to be specified the names of as many as be wedded, and the names of them that be buried, and of all those that be christened." * They dreaded new "charges;" and well they might dread. But Thomas Cromwell had not regal

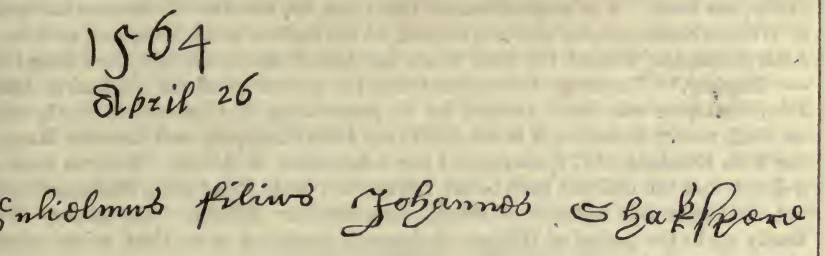
* Cromwell's Correspondence, in the Chapter-House. Quoted in Rickman's Preface to Population Returns, 1831.

exactions in his mind. The Registers were at first imperfectly kept; but the regulation of 1538 was strictly enforced in the first year of Elizabeth; and then the Register of the Parish of Stratford-upon-Avon commences, that is, in 1558.

Every such record of human life is a solemn document. Birth, Marriage, Death! —this is the whole history of the sojourn upon earth of nearly every name inscribed in these time-preserved pages. And after a few years what is the interest, even to their own descendants, of these brief annals? The last entry is too frequently the most interesting; for the question is, Did they leave property? Is some legal verification of their possession of property necessary?—

"No further seek their merits to disclose."

But there are entries in this Register-book of Stratford that are interesting to *us*—to all Englishmen—to universal mankind. We have all received a precious legacy from one whose progress from the cradle to the grave is here recorded—a bequest large enough for us all, and for all who will come after us. Pause we on the *one* entry of that book which most concerns the human race:—



William, the son of John Shakspere, baptized on the 26th April, 1564.* And when born? The want of such information is a defect in all parish-registers. Baptism so immediately followed birth in those times, when infancy was surrounded with greater dangers than in our own days of improved medical science, that we may believe that William Shakspere first saw the light only a day or two previous to this legal record of his existence. There is no direct evidence that he was born on the 23rd of April according to the common belief. But there was probably a tradition to that effect, for some years ago the Rev. Joseph Greene, a master of the grammar-school at Stratford, in an extract which he made from the Register of Shakspere's baptism, wrote in the margin, "Born on the 23rd." We turn back to the first year of the registry, 1558, and we find the baptism of Joan, daughter to John Shakspere, on the 15th of September. Again, in 1562, on the 2nd of December, Margaret, daughter to John Shakspere, is baptized. In the entry of burials in 1563 we find, under date of April 30, that Margaret closed a short life in five months. The elder daughter Joan also died young. We look forward, and in 1566 find the birth of a son, after William, registered:—Gilbert, son of John Shakspere, was baptized on the 13th of October of that year. In 1569 there is the registry of the baptism of Joan, daughter of John Shakspere, on the 15th of April. Thus, the registry of a second Joan leaves no reasonable doubt that the first died, and that a favourite name was preserved in the family. In 1571 Anne is baptized; she died in 1579. In 1573-4 another son was baptized,—Richard, son of Master *(Magister)* John Shakspere, on the 11th of

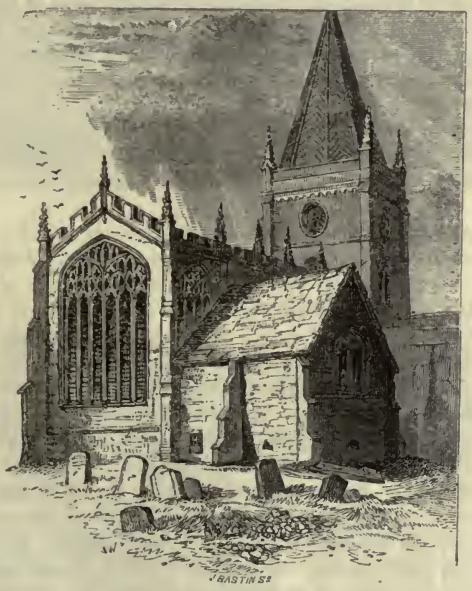
* The date of the year, and the word April, occur three lines above the entry—the baptism being the fourth registered in that month. The register of Stratford is a tall narrow book, of considerable thickness, the leaves formed of very fine vellum. But this book is only a transcript, attested by the vicar and four churchwardens, on every page of the registers from 1558 to 1600. The above is therefore not a fac-simile of the original entry.

March. The last entry, which determines the extent of John Shakspere's family, is that of Edmund, son of Master John Shakspere, baptized on the 3rd of May, 1580. Here, then, we find that two sisters of William were removed by death, probably before his birth. In two years and a half another son, Gilbert, came to be his playmate; and when he was five years old that most precious gift to a loving boy was granted, a sister, who grew up with him, and survived him. Another sister was born when he had reached seven years; and as he was growing into youthful strength, a boy of fifteen, his last sister died;—and then his youngest brother was born. William, Gilbert, Joan, Richard, Edmund, constituted the whole of the family who survived the period of infancy. Rowe, we have already seen, mentions the large family of John Shakspere, "ten children in all." Malone has established very satisfactorily the origin of this error into which Rowe has fallen. In later years there was another John Shakspere in Stratford. In the books of the corporation the name of John Shakspere, shoemaker, can be traced in 1580; in the register in 1584 we find him married to Margery Roberts, who died in 1587; he is, without doubt, married a second time, for in 1589, 1590, and 1591, Ursula, Humphrey, and Philip, are born. It is unquestionable that these are not the children of the father of William Shakspere, for they are entered in the register as the daughter, or sons, of John Shakspere, without the style which our John Shakspere always bore after 1569 —"*Magister.*" There can be no doubt that the mother of all the children of *Master* John Shakspere was Mary Arden; for in proceedings in Chancery in 1597, which we shall notice hereafter, it is set forth that John Shakspere and his wife Mary, in the 20th Elizabeth, 1577, mortgaged her inheritance of Asbies. Nor can there be a doubt that the children born before 1569, when he is styled John Shakspere, without the honourable addition of *Master*, were also *her* children. The history of the family up to the period of William Shakspere's manhood is as clear as can reasonably be expected.

William Shakspere has been carried to the baptismal font in that fine old church of Stratford. The "thick-pleached alley" that leads through the churchyard to

[The Church Avenue.]

the porch is putting forth its buds and leaves.* The chestnut hangs its white blossoms over the grassy mounds of that resting-place. All is joyous in the spring sunshine. Kind neighbours are smiling upon the happy father; maidens and matrons snatch a kiss of the sleeping boy. There is "a spirit of life in everything" on this 26th of April, 1564. Summer comes, but it brings not joy to Stratford. There is wailing in her streets and woe in her houses. The death-register tells a fearful history. From the 30th June to the 31st December, two hundred and thirty-eight inhabitants, a sixth of the population, are carried to the grave. The plague is in the fated town; the doors are marked with the red cross, and the terrible inscription, "Lord, have mercy upon us." It is the same epidemic which ravaged Europe in that year; which in the previous year had desolated London, and still continued there; of which sad time Stow pithily says—"The poor citizens of London were this year plagued with a three-fold plague, pestilence, scarcity of money, and dearth of victuals; the misery whereof were too long here to write: no doubt the poor remember it; the rich by flight into the countries made shift for themselves." Scarcity of money and dearth of victuals are the harbingers and the ministers of pestilence. Despair gathers up itself to die. Labour goes not forth to its accustomed duties. Shops are closed. The market-cross hears no hum of trade. The harvest lies almost ungathered in the fields. At last the destroying angel has gone on his way. The labourers are thinned; there is more demand for labour; "victuals" are not more abundant, but there are fewer left to share the earth's bounty. Then the adult rush into marriage. A year of pestilence is followed by a year of weddings;* and such a "strange eventful history" does the Stratford register tell. The Charnel-house—a melancholy-looking appendage to the chancel of Stratford Church, (now removed,) had



[Stratford Church.]

* It is supposed that such a green avenue was an old appendage to the church, the present trees having taken the place of more ancient ones.

† See "Malthus on Population," book ii., chap. 12.

then its heaps of unhonoured bones fearfully disturbed: but soon the old tower heard again the wedding-peal. The red cross was probably not on the door of John Shakspere's dwelling. "Fortunately for mankind," says Malone, "it did not reach the house where the infant Shakspere lay; for not one of that name appears on the dead list. A poetical enthusiast will find no difficulty in believing that, like Horace, he reposed secure and fearless in the midst of contagion and death, protected by the Muses to whom his future life was to be devoted:—

'sacrâ
Lauroque, collatâque myrto,
Non sine diis animosus infans.'"

There were more real dangers around Shakspere than could be averted by the sacred laurel and the myrtle—something more fearful than the serpent and the bear of the Roman poet.* *He*, by whom

"Spirits are not finely touch'd
But to fine issues,"

may be said, without offence, to have guarded this unconscious child. William Shakspere was to be an instrument, and a great one, in the intellectual advancement of mankind. The guards that He placed around that threshold of Stratford, as secondary ministers, were cleanliness, abundance, free air, parental watchfulness. The "*non sine diis*"—the "protected by the Muses,"—rightly considered, must mean the same guardianship. Each is a recognition of something higher than accident and mere physical laws.

The parish of Stratford, then, was unquestionably the birth-place of William Shakspere. But in what part of Stratford dwelt his parents in the year 1564? It was ten years after this that his father became the purchaser of two freehold houses in Henley Street—houses which still exist—houses which the *people* of England have agreed to preserve as a precious relic of their greatest brother. William Shakspere, then, might have been born at either of his father's copyhold houses, in Greenhill Street, or in Henley Street; he might have been born at Ingon; or his father might have occupied one of the two freehold houses in Henley Street at the time of the birth of his eldest son. Tradition says, that William Shakspere *was* born in one of these houses; tradition points out the very room in which he was born.

Whether Shakspere were born here, or not, there can be little doubt that this property was the home of his boyhood. It was purchased by John Shakspere, from Edmund Hall and Emma his wife, for forty pounds. In a copy of the chirograph of the fine levied on this occasion (which is now in the possession of Mr. Wheler, of Stratford) the property is described as two messuages, two gardens, and two orchards, with their appurtenances. This document does not define the situation of the property, beyond its being in Stratford-upon-Avon; but in the deed of sale of another property in 1591, that property is described as situate between the houses of Robert Johnson and John Shakspere; and in 1597 John Shakspere himself sells a "toft, or parcel of land," in Henley Street, to the purchaser of the property in 1591. The properties can be traced, and leave no doubt of this house in Henley Street being the residence of John Shakspere. He retained the property during his life; and it descended, as his heir-at-law, to his son William. In the last testament of the poet is this bequest to his "sister Joan:"—"I do will and devise unto her the house, with the appurtenances, in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her natural life, under the yearly rent of twelve-pence." His sister Joan, whose name by mar-

* Hor. lib. iii., car. iv.

2

3

riage was Hart, was residing there in 1639, and she probably continued to reside there till her death in 1646. The *one* house in which Mrs. Hart resided was doubtless the half of the building now forming the butcher's shop and the tenement adjoining; for the other house was known as the Maidenhead Inn, in 1642. In another part of Shakspere's will he bequeaths, amongst the bulk of his property, to his eldest daughter, Susanna Hall, with remainder to her male issue, "two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford." There are existing settlements of this very property in the family of Shakspere's eldest daughter and grand-daughter; and this grand-daughter, Elizabeth Nash, who was married a second time to Sir John Barnard, left both houses,—namely, "the inn, called the Maidenhead, and the adjoining house and barn,"—to her kinsmen Thomas and George Hart, the grandsons of her grandfather's "sister Joan." These persons left descendants, with whom this property remained until the beginning of the present century. But it was gradually diminished. The orchards and gardens were originally extensive: a century ago tenements had been built upon them, and they were alienated by the Hart then in possession. The Maidenhead Inn became the Swan Inn, and is now the Swan and Maidenhead. The White Lion, on the other side of the property, was extended, so as to include the remaining orchards and gardens. The house in which Mrs. Hart had lived so long became divided into two tenements; and at the end of the last century the lower part of one was a butcher's shop.

The engraving (page 21) exhibits John Shakspere's houses in Henley Street under three different aspects. No. 1 (the top) is from an original drawing made by Colonel Delamotte in 1788. The houses, it will be observed, then presented one uniform front; and there were dormer windows connected with rooms in the roof. We have a plan before us, accompanying Mr. Wheler's account of these premises, which shows that they occupied a frontage of thirty-one feet. No. 2 is from an original drawing made by Mr. Pyne, after a sketch by Mr. Edridge in 1807. We now see that the dormer windows are removed, as also the gable at the east end of the front. The house has been shorn of much of its external importance. No. 3 is from a lithograph engraving in Mr. Wheler's account, published in 1824. The premises, we now see, have been pretty equally divided. The Swan and Maidenhead half has had its windows modernized, and the continuation of the timber-frame has been obliterated by a brick casing. In 1807, we observe that the western half had been divided into two tenements;—the fourth of the whole premises, that is the butcher's shop, the kitchen behind, and the two rooms over, being the portion commonly shown as Shakspere's House. Some years ago, upon a frontage in continuation of the tenement at the west, three small cottages were built. The whole of this portion of the property has been purchased for the nation, as well as the two tenements.

Was William Shakspere, then, born in the house in Henley Street which has been purchased by the nation? For ourselves, we frankly confess that the want of absolute certainty that Shakspere was there born, produces a state of mind that is something higher and pleasanter than the conviction that depends upon positive evidence. We are content to follow the popular faith undoubtingly. The traditionary belief is sanctified by long usage and universal acceptation. The merely curious look in reverent silence upon that mean room, with its massive joists and plastered walls, firm with ribs of oak, where they are told the poet of the human race was born. Eyes now closed on the world, but who have left that behind which the world "will not willingly let die," have glistened under this humble roof, and there have been thoughts unutterable—solemn, confiding, grateful, humble—clustering round their hearts in that hour. The autographs of Byron and Scott are amongst

hundreds of perishable inscriptions. Disturb not the belief that William Shakspere first saw the light in this venerated room.

"The victor Time has stood on Avon's side
To doom the fall of many a home of pride;
Rapine o'er Evesham's gilded fane has strode,
And gorgeous Kenilworth has paved the road:
But Time has gently laid his withering hands
On one frail House—the House of Shakspere stands;
Centuries are gone—fallen 'the cloud-capp'd tow'rs;'
But Shakspere's home, his boyhood's home, is ours!"

Prologue for the Shakspere Night, Dec. 7, 1847, *by C. Knight.*

[Room in the House in Henley Street.]

[Inner Court of the Grammar School.]

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOOL.

THE poet in his well-known "Seven Ages" has necessarily presented to us only the great boundary-marks of a human life: the progress from one stage to another he has left to be imagined:—

> "At first the infant
> Muling and puking in the nurse's arms."

Perhaps the most influential, though the least observed part of man's existence, that in which he learns most of good or of evil, lies in the progress between this first act and the second:—

> "And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
> And shining morning face, creeping like snail
> Unwillingly to school."

Between the "nurse's arms" and the "school" there is an important interval, filled up by a mother's education.

There is a passage in one of Shakspere's Sonnets, the 89th, which has induced a

belief that he had the misfortune of a physical defect, which would render him peculiarly the object of maternal solicitude:—

"Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
And I will comment upon that offence:
Speak of my *lameness*, and I straight will halt;
Against thy reasons making no defence."

Again, in the 37th Sonnet:—

"As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made *lame* by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth."

These lines have been interpreted to mean that William Shakspere was literally lame, and that his lameness was such as to limit him, when he became an actor, to the representation of the parts of old men. Mr. Harness has truly observed that "many an infirmity of the kind may be skilfully concealed, or only become visible in the moments of hurried movement;" and he adds, "either Sir Walter Scott or Lord Byron might, without any impropriety, have written the verses in question." We should have no doubt whatever that the verses we have quoted may be most fitly received in a metaphorical sense, were there not some subsequent lines in the 37th Sonnet which really appear to have a literal meaning; and thus to render the previous *lame* and *lameness* expressive of something more than the general self-abasement which they would otherwise appear to imply. In the following lines *lame* means something distinct from *poor* and *despised*:—

"For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, of all, or more,
Entitled in thy parts do crowned sit,
I make my love engrafted to this store:
So then I am not *lame*, poor, nor despis'd,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give."

Of one thing, however, we may be quite sure—that, if Shakspere were lame, his infirmity was not such as to disqualify him for active bodily exertion. The same series of verses that have suggested this belief that he was lame also show that he was a horseman.* His entire works exhibit that familiarity with external nature, with rural occupations, with athletic sports, which is incompatible with an inactive boyhood. It is not impossible that some natural defect, or some accidental injury, may have modified the energy of such a child; and have cherished in him that love of books, and traditionary lore, and silent contemplation, without which his intellect could not have been nourished into its wondrous strength. But we cannot imagine William Shakspere a petted child, chained to home, not breathing the free air upon his native hills, denied the boy's privilege to explore every nook of his own river. We would imagine him communing from the first with Nature, as Gray has painted him—

"The *dauntless* child
Stretch'd forth his little arms and smil'd."

The only qualifications necessary for the admission of a boy into the Free Grammar School of Stratford were, that he should be a resident in the town, of seven years of age, and able to read. The Grammar School was essentially connected with the Corporation of Stratford; and it is impossible to imagine that, when the son of John Shakspere became qualified by age for admission to a school where the best education of the time was given, literally for nothing, his father, in that year, being chief alder-

* See Sonnets 50 and 51.

man, should not have sent him to the school. We assume, without any hesitation, that William Shakspere did receive in every just sense of the word the education of a scholar; and as such education was to be had at his own door, we also assume that he was brought up at the Free Grammar School of his own town. His earlier instruction would therefore be a preparation for this school.

In the first year of Edward VI. was published by authority "The A B C, with the Pater-noster, Ave, Crede, and Ten Commandementtes in Englysshe, newly translated and set forth at the kynges most gracious commandement." But the A B C soon became more immediately connected with systematic instruction in religious belief. The alphabet and a few short lessons were followed by the catechism, so that the book containing the catechism came to be called an A B C book, or Absey-book. Towards the end of Edward's reign was put forth by authority "A Short Catechisme, or playne instruction, conteynynge the sūme of christian learninge," which all schoolmasters were called upon to teach after the "little catechism" previously set forth. Such books were undoubtedly suppressed in the reign of Mary, but upon the accession of Elizabeth they were again circulated. A question then arises, Did William Shakspere receive his elementary instruction in Christianity from the books sanctioned by the Reformed Church? It has been maintained that his father belonged to the Roman Catholic persuasion. This belief rests upon the following foundation. In the year 1770, Thomas Hart, who then inhabited one of the tenements in Henley Street which had been bequeathed to his family by William Shakspere's grand-daughter, employed a bricklayer to new tile the house; and this bricklayer, by name Mosely, found hidden between the rafters and the tiling a manuscript consisting of six leaves stitched together, which he gave to Mr. Peyton, an alderman of Stratford, who sent it to Mr. Malone, through the Rev. Mr. Devonport, vicar of Stratford. This paper, which was first published by Malone in 1790, is printed also in Reed's Shakspeare and in Drake's "Shakspeare and his Times." It consists of fourteen articles, purporting to be a confession of faith of "John Shakspear, an unworthy member of the holy Catholic religion." We have no hesitation whatever in believing this document to be altogether a fabrication. Chalmers says, "It was the performance of a clerk, the undoubted work of the family priest."* Malone, when he first published the paper in his edition of Shakspeare, said—"I have taken some pains to ascertain the authenticity of this manuscript, and, after a very careful inquiry, am perfectly satisfied that it is genuine." In 1796, however, in his work on the Ireland forgeries, he asserts—"I have since obtained documents that clearly prove it could not have been the composition of any one of our poet's family." We not only do not believe that it was "the composition of any one of our poet's family," nor "the undoubted work of the family priest," but we do not believe that it is the work of a Roman Catholic at all. It professes to be the writer's "last spiritual will, testament, confession, protestation, and confession of faith." Now, if the writer had been a Roman Catholic, or if it had been drawn up for his approval and signature by his priest, it would necessarily, professing such fulness and completeness, have contained something of belief touching the then material points of spiritual difference between the Roman and the Reformed Church. Nothing, however, can be more vague than all this tedious protestation and confession; with the exception that phrases, and indeed long passages, are introduced for the purpose of marking the supposed writer's opinions in the way that should be most offensive to those of a contrary opinion, as if by way of bravado or seeking of persecution. In this his last confession, spiritual will, and testament, he calls upon all his kinsfolks to assist and succour him after his death "with the holy sacrifice of the mass," with a promise that he "will not be ungrateful unto them for so great a benefit,"

* "Apology for the Believers," page 199.

well knowing that by the Act of 1581 the saying of mass was punishable by a year's imprisonment and a fine of 200 marks, and the hearing of it by a similar imprisonment and fine of 100 marks. The fabrication appears to us as gross as can well be imagined.

That John Shakspere was what we popularly call a Protestant in the year 1568, when his son William was four years old, may be shown by the clearest of proofs. He was in that year the chief magistrate of Stratford; he could not have become so without taking the Oath of Supremacy, according to the statute of the 1st of Elizabeth, 1558-9. To refuse this oath was made punishable with forfeiture and imprisonment, with the pains of præmunire and high treason. "The conjecture," says Chalmers (speaking in support of the authenticity of this confession of faith), "that Shakspeare's family were Roman Catholics, is strengthened by the fact that his father declined to attend the corporation meetings, and was at last removed from the corporate body." He was removed from the corporate body in 1586, with a distinct statement of the reason for this removal—his non-attendance when summoned to the halls. But a subsequent discovery of a document in the State Paper Office, communicated by Mr. Lemon to Mr. Collier, shews that in 1592, Mr. John Shakspere, with fourteen of his neighbours, were returned by certain Commissioners as "such recusants as have been heretofore presented for not coming monthly to the church according to her Majesty's laws, and yet are thought to forbear the church for debt and for fear of process, or for some other worse faults, or for age, sickness, or impotency of body." John Shakspere is classed amongst nine who "came not to church for fear of process for debt." We shall have to notice this assigned reason for the recusancy in a future Chapter. But the religious part of the question is capable of another solution, than that the father of Shakspere had become reconciled to the Romish religion. At that period the puritan section of the English church were acquiring great strength in Stratford and the neighbourhood; and in 1596, Richard Bifield, one of the most zealous of the puritan ministers, became its Vicar.* John Shakspere and his neighbours might not have been Popish recusants, and yet have avoided the church. It must be borne in mind that the parents of William Shakspere passed through the great changes of religious opinion, as the greater portion of the people passed, without any violent corresponding change in their habits derived from their forefathers. In the time of Henry VIII. the great contest of opinion was confined to the supremacy of the Pope; the great practical state measure was the suppression of the religious houses. Under Edward VI. there was a very careful compromise of all those opinions and practices in which the laity were participant. In the short reign of Mary the persecution of the Reformers must have been offensive even to those who clung fastest to the ancient institutions and modes of belief; and even when the Reformation was fully established under Elizabeth, the habits of the people were still very slightly interfered with. The astounding majority of the conforming clergy is a convincing proof how little the opinions of the laity must have been disturbed. They would naturally go along with their old teachers. We have to imagine, then, that the father of William Shakspere, and his mother, were, at the time of his birth, of the religion established by law. His father, by holding a high municipal office after the accession of Elizabeth, had solemnly declared his adherence to the great principle of Protestantism—the acknowledgment of the civil sovereign as the head of the church. The speculative opinions in which the child was brought up would naturally shape themselves to the creed which his father must have professed in his capacity of magistrate; but, according to some opinions, this profession was a disguise on the part of his father. The young Shakspere was brought up in the Roman persuasion, according to these notions, because

* Hunter: "New Illustrations," Vol. I., p. 106.

he intimates an acquaintance with the practices of the Roman church, and mentions purgatory, shrift, confession, in his dramas.* Surely the poet might exhibit this familiarity with the ancient language of all Christendom, without thus speaking "from the overflow of Roman Catholic zeal."† Was it "Roman Catholic zeal" which induced him to write those strong lines in King John against the "Italian priest," and against those who

"Purchase corrupted pardon of a man?"

Was it "Roman Catholic zeal" which made him introduce these words into the famous prophecy of the glory and happiness of the reign of Elizabeth—

"God shall be truly known?"

He was brought up, without doubt, in the opinions which his father publicly professed, in holding office subject to his most solemn affirmation of those opinions. The distinctions between the Protestant and the Popish recusant were then not so numerous or speculative as they afterwards became. But, such as they were, we may be sure that William Shakspere learnt his catechism in all sincerity; that he frequented the church in which he and his brothers and sisters were baptized; that he was prepared for the discipline of the school in which religious instruction by a minister of the church was regularly afforded as the end of the other knowledge there taught. He became tolerant, according to the manifestation of his after-writings, through nature and the habits and friendships of his early life. But that tolerance does not presume insincerity in himself or his family. The "Confession of Faith," found in the roof of his father's house two hundred years after he was born, would argue the extreme of religious zeal, even to the defiance of all law and authority, on the part of a man who had by the acceptance of office professed his adherence to the established national faith. If that paper were to be believed, we must be driven to the conclusion that John Shakspere was an unconscientious hypocrite for one part of his life, and a furious bigot for the other part. It is much easier to believe that the Reformation fell lightly upon John Shakspere, as it did upon the bulk of the laity; and that he and his wife, without any offence to their consciences, saw the Common Prayer take the place of the Mass-book, and acknowledged the temporal sovereign to be head of the church: that in the education of their children they dispensed with auricular confession and penance; but that they, in common with their neighbours, tolerated, and perhaps delighted in, many of the festivals and imaginative forms of the old religion, and even looked up for heavenly aid through intercession, without fancying that they were yielding to an idolatrous superstition, such as Puritanism came subsequently to denounce. The transition from the old worship to the new was not an ungentle one for the laity. The early reformers were too wise to attempt to root up habits—those deep-sunk foundations of the past which break the ploughshares of legislation when it strives to work an inch below the earth's surface.

To the grammar-school, then, with some preparation, we hold that William Shakspere goes, about the year 1571. His father is at this time, as we have said, chief alderman of his town; he is a gentleman, now, of repute and authority,—he is Master John Shakspere; and assuredly the worthy curate of the neighbouring village of Luddington, Thomas Hunt, who was also the school-master, would have received his new scholar with some kindness. As his "shining morning face" first passed out of the main street into that old court through which the upper room of learning was to be reached, a new life would be opening upon him. The humble minister of religion who was his first instructor has left no memorials

* See Chalmers's "Apology," p. 200.

† Chalmers. See also Drake, who adopts, in great measure, Chalmers's argument.

of his talents or his acquirements; and in a few years another master came after him, Thomas Jenkins, also unknown to fame. All praise and honour be to them; for it is impossible to imagine that the teachers of William Shakspere were evil instructors—giving the boy husks instead of wholesome aliment. They could not have been harsh and perverse instructors, for such spoil the gentlest natures, and his was always gentle:—"My gentle Shakspere" is he called by a rough but noble spirit—one in whom was all honesty and genial friendship under a rude exterior. His wondrous abilities could not be spoiled even by ignorant instructors.

In the seventh year of the reign of Edward VI. a royal charter was granted to Stratford for the incorporation of the inhabitants. That charter recites—"That the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon was an ancient borough, in which a certain guild was theretofore founded, and endowed with divers lands, tenements, and possessions, out of the rents, revenues, and profits whereof a certain free grammar-school for the education of boys there was made and supported."* The charter further recites the other public objects to which the property of the guild had been applied;—that it was dissolved; and that its possessions had come into the hands of the king. The charter of incorporation then grants to the bailiff and burgesses certain properties which were parcel of the possessions of the guild, for the general charges of the borough, for the maintenance of an ancient almshouse, "and that the free grammar-school for the instruction and education of boys and youth there should be thereafter kept up and maintained as theretofore it used to be." It may be doubted whether Stratford was benefited by the dissolution of its guild. We see that its grammar-school was an ancient establishment: it was not a creation of the charter of Edward VI., although it is popularly called one of the grammar-schools of that king, and was the last school established by him.† The people of Stratford had possessed the advantage of a school for instruction in Greek and Latin, which is the distinct object of a grammar-school, from the time of Edward IV., when Thomas Jolyffe, in 1482, "granted to the guild of the Holy Cross of Stratford-upon-Avon all his lands and tenements in Stratford and Dodwell, in the county of Warwick, upon condition that the master, aldermen, and proctors of the said guild should find a priest, fit and able in knowledge, to teach grammar freely to all scholars coming to the school in the said town to him, taking nothing of the scholars for their teaching."‡ Dugdale describes the origin of guilds, speaking of this of Stratford:—"Such meetings were at first used by a mutual agreement of friends and neighbours, and particular licenses granted to them for conferring lands or rents to defray their public charges in respect that, by the statute of mortmain, such gifts would otherwise have been forfeited."

In the surveys of Henry VIII., previous to the dissolution of religious houses, there were four salaried priests belonging to the guild of Stratford, with a clerk, who was also schoolmaster, at a salary of ten pounds per annum.§ They were a hospitable body these guild-folk, for there was an annual feast, to which all the fraternity resorted, with their tenants and farmers; and an inventory of their goods in the 15th of Edward IV. shows that they were rich in plate for the service of the table, as well as of the chapel. That chapel was partly rebuilt by the great benefactor of Stratford, Sir Hugh Clopton; and after the dissolution of the guild and the establishment of the grammar-school by the charter of Edward VI., the school was in all probability kept within it. There is an entry in the Corporation books, of February 18, 1594-5—"At this hall it was agreed by the bailiff and the greater number of the company now present that there shall be no school kept in the chapel from this time following." In associating, therefore, the schoolboy days of William

* "Report of the Commissioners for inquiring concerning Charities." † See Strype's "Memorials."
‡ "Report of Commissioners," &c. § Dugdale.

Shakspere with the Free Grammar-School of Stratford, we cannot with any certainty imagine him engaged in his daily tasks in the ancient room which is now the school-

[Interior of the Grammar School.]

room. And yet the use of the chapel as a school, discontinued in 1595, might only have been a temporary use. A little space may be occupied in a notice of each building.

The grammar-school is now an ancient room over the old town-hall of Stratford; —both, no doubt, offices of the ancient guild. We enter from the street into a court, of which one side is formed by the chapel of the Holy Cross. Opposite the chapel is a staircase, ascending which we are in a plain room, with a ceiling. But it is evident that this work of plaster is modern, and that above it we have the oak roof of the sixteenth century. In this room are a few forms and a rude antique desk.

The Chapel of the Guild is in great part a very perfect specimen of the plainer ecclesiastical architecture of the reign of Henry VII.:—a building of just proportions and some ornament, but not running into elaborate decoration. The interior now presents nothing very remarkable. But upon a general repair of the chapel in 1804, beneath the whitewash of successive generations, was discovered a series of most remarkable paintings, some in that portion of the building erected by Sir Hugh Clopton, and others in the far more ancient chancel. A very elaborate series of coloured engravings has been published from these paintings, from drawings made at the time of their discovery by Mr. Thomas Fisher. There can be little doubt, from the defacement of some of the paintings, that they were partially destroyed by violence, and all attempted to be obliterated in the progress of the Reformation. But that outbreak of zeal did not belong to the first periods of religious change; and it is most probable that these paintings were existing in the early years of

[Chapel of the Guild, and Grammar School: Street Front.]

Elizabeth's reign. When the five priests of the guild were driven from their home and their means of maintenance, the chapel no doubt ceased to be a place of worship; and it probably became the school-room, after the foundation of the grammar-school, distinct from the guild, under the charter of Edward VI. If it was the school-room of William Shakspere, those rude paintings must have produced a powerful effect upon his imagination. Many of them in the ancient chancel constituted a pictorial romance—the history of the Holy Cross, from its origin as a tree at the Creation of the World to its rescue from the pagan Cosdroy, King of Persia, by the Christian King, Heraclius;—and its final Exaltation at Jerusalem,—the anniversary of which event was celebrated at Stratford at its annual fair, held on the 14th of September. There were other pictures of Saints, and Martyrdoms; and one, especially, of the murder of Thomas à Becket, which exhibits great force, without that grotesqueness which generally belongs to our early paintings. There were fearful pictures, too, of the last Judgment; with the Seven Deadly Sins visibly portrayed,—the punishments of the evil, the rewards of the just. Surrounded as he was with the memorials of the old religion—with great changes on every side, but still very recent changes—how impossible was it that Shakspere should not have been thoroughly imbued with a knowledge of all that pertained to the faith of his ancestors! One of the most philosophical writers of our day has said that Catholicism gave us Shakspere.* Not so, entirely. Shakspere belonged to the tran-

* Carlyle: "French Revolution."

sition period, or he could not have been quite what he was. His intellect was not the dwarfish and precocious growth of the hot-bed of change, and still less of convulsion. His whole soul was permeated with the ancient vitalities—the things which the changes of institutions could not touch; but it could bourgeon under the new influences, and blend the past and the present, as the "giant oak" of five hundred winters is covered with the foliage of one spring. But there was one blessing which Catholicism would have withheld from him. When in the year 1537 the Bible in English was first printed by authority, Richard Grafton, the printer, sent six copies to Cranmer, beseeching the archbishop to accept them as his simple gift, adding, "For your lordship, moving our most gracious prince to the allowance and licensing of such a work, hath wrought such an act worthy of praise as never was mentioned in any chronicle in this realm." From that time, with the exception of the short interval of the reign of Mary, the presses of London were for the most part employed in printing Bibles. That book, to whose wonderful heart-stirring narratives the child listens with awe and love, was now and ever after to be the solace of the English home. With "the Great Bible" open before her, the mother would read aloud to her little ones that beautiful story of Joseph sold into slavery, and then advanced to honour—and how his brethren knew him not when, suppressing his tears, he said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake?" —or, how, when the child Samuel was laid down to sleep, the Lord called to him three times, and he grew, and God was with him;—or, how the three holy men who would not worship the golden image walked about in the midst of the burning fiery furnace;—or how the prophet that was unjustly cast into the den of lions was found unhurt, because the true God had sent his angels and shut the lions' mouths. These were the solemn and affecting narratives, wonderfully preserved for our instruction from a long antiquity, that in the middle of the sixteenth century became unclosed to the people of England. But more especially was that other Testament opened which most imported them to know; and thus, when the child repeated in lisping accents the Christian's prayer to his Father in heaven, the mother could expound to him that, when the Divine Author of that prayer first gave it to us, He taught us that the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, were the happy and the beloved of God; and laid down that comprehesive law of justice, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We believe that the education of William Shakspere was grounded upon this Book; and that, if this Book had been sealed to his childhood, he might have been the poet of nature, of passion,—his humour might have been as rich as we find it, and his wit as pointed,—but that he would not have been the poet of the most profound as well as the most tolerant philosophy; his insight into the nature of man, his meanness and his grandeur, his weakness and his strength, would not have been what it is.

[Village of Aston Cantlow.]

CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S WORLD.

LET us pass over for a time the young Shakspere at his school-desk, inquiring not when he went from "The Short Dictionary" forward to the use of "Cooper's Lexicon," or whether he was most drilled in the "Eclogues" of Virgil, or those of the "good old Mantuan." Of one thing we may be well assured,—that the instruction of the grammar-school was the right instruction for the most vivacious mind, as for him of slower capacity. To spend a considerable portion of the years of boyhood in the acquirement of Latin and Greek was not to waste them, as modern illumination would instruct us. Something was to be acquired, accurately and completely, that was of universal application, and within the boy's power of acquirement. The particular knowledge that would fit him for a chosen course of life would be an after acquirement; and, having attained the habit of patient study, and established in his own mind a standard to apply to all branches of knowledge by knowing one branch well, he would enter upon the race of life without being over-weighted with the elements of many arts and sciences, which it belongs only to the mature intellect to bear easily and gracefully, and to employ to lasting profit. Our grammar-schools were wise institutions. They opened the road to usefulness and honour to the humblest in the land; they bestowed upon the son of the peasant the same advantages of education as the son of the noble could receive from the most accomplished teacher in his father's halls. Long may they be preserved amongst us in their integrity; not converted by the meddlings of innovation into lecture-rooms for cramming children with the nomenclature of every science; presenting little idea

even of the physical world beyond that of its being a vast aggregation of objects that may be classified and catalogued; and leaving the spiritual world utterly uncared for, as a region whose products cannot be readily estimated by a money value.

Every schoolboy's dwelling-place is a microcosm; but the little world lying around William Shakspere was something larger than that in which boys of our own time for the most part live. The division of employments had not so completely separated a town life from a country life as with us; and even the town occupations, the town amusements, and the town wonders, had more variety in them than our own days of systematic arrangement can present. Much of the education of Shakspere was unquestionably in the fields. A thousand incidental allusions manifest his familiarity with all the external aspects of nature. He is very rarely a descriptive poet, distinctively so called; but images of mead and grove, of dale and upland, of forest depths, of quiet walks by gentle rivers,—reflections of his own native scenery,—spread themselves without an effort over all his writings. All the occupations of a rural life are glanced at or embodied in his characters. The sports, the festivals, of the lone farm or the secluded hamlet are presented by him with all the charms of an Arcadian age, but with a truthfulness that is not found in Arcadia. The nicest peculiarities in the habits of the lower creation are given at a touch: we see the rook wing his evening flight to the wood; we hear the drowsy hum of the sharded beetle. He wreathes all the flowers of the field in his delicate chaplets; and even the nicest mysteries of the gardener's art can be expounded by him. All this he appears to do as if from an instinctive power. His poetry in this, as in all other great essentials, is like the operations of nature itself; we see not its workings. But we may be assured, from the very circumstance of its appearing so accidental, so spontaneous in its relations to all external nature and to the country life, that it had its foundation in very early and very accurate observation. Stratford was especially fitted to have been the "green lap" in which the boy-poet was "laid." The whole face of creation here wore an aspect of quiet loveliness. Looking on its placid stream, its gently swelling hills, its rich pastures, its sleeping woodlands, the external world would to him be full of images of repose: it was in the heart of man that he was to seek for the sublime. Nature has thus ever with him something genial and exhilarating. There are storms in his great dramas, but they are the accompaniments of the more terrible storms of human passions: they are raised by the poet's art to make the agony of Lear more intense, and the murder of Duncan more awful. But his love of a smiling creation seems ever present. We must image Stratford as it was, to see how the young Shakspere walked "in glory and in joy" amongst his native fields. Upon the bank of the Avon, having a very slight rise, is placed a scattered town; a town whose dwellings have orchards and gardens, with lofty trees growing in its pathways. Its splendid collegiate church, in the time of Henry VIII., was described to lie half a mile from the town. Its eastern window is reflected in the river which flows beneath; its gray tower is embowered amidst lofty elm-rows. At the opposite end of the town is a fine old bridge, with a causeway whose "wearisome but needful length" tells of inundations in the low pastures that lie all around it. We look upon Dugdale's Map of Barichway Hundred, in which Stratford is situated, published in 1656, and we see four roads issuing from the town. The one to Henley in Arden, which lies through the street in which Shakspere may be supposed to have passed his boyhood, continues over a valley of some breadth and extent, unenclosed fields undoubtedly in the sixteenth century, with the hamlets of Shottery and Bishopton amidst them. The road leads into the then woody district of Arden. At a short distance from it is the hamlet of Wilmecote, where Mary Arden dwelt; and some two miles aside, more in the heart of the

woodland district, and hard by the river Alne, is the village of Aston Cantlow. Another road indicated on this old map is that to Warwick. The wooded hills of Welcombe overhang it, and a little aside, some mile and a half from Stratford, is the meadow of Ingon which John Shakspere rented in 1570. Very beautiful, even now, is this part of the neighbourhood, with its rapid undulations, little dells which shut in the scattered sheep, and sudden hills opening upon a wide landscape. Ancient crab-trees and hawthorns tell of uncultivated downs which have rung to the call of the falconer or the horn of the huntsman ; and then, having crossed the ridge, we are amongst rich corn-lands, with farm-houses of no modern date scattered about ; and deep in the hollow, so as to be hidden till we are upon it, the old village of Snitterfield, with its ancient church and its yew-tree as ancient. Here the poet's mother had property ; and here, it is reasonably conjectured, his father's family lived On the opposite side of Stratford, the third road runs in the direction of the Avon to the village of Bidford, with a nearer pathway along the river-bank. We cross the ancient bridge by the fourth road (which also diverges to Shipston), and we are on our way to the celebrated house and estate of Charlcote, the ancient seat of the Lucys, the Shaksperian locality with which most persons are familiar through traditions of deer-stealing. A pleasant ramble indeed is this to Charlcote and Hampton Lucy, even with glimpses of the Avon from a turnpike-road. But let the road run through meadows without hedgerows, with pathways following the river's bank, now diverging when the mill is close upon the stream, now crossing a leafy elevation, and then suddenly dropping under a precipitous wooded rock, and we have a walk such as poet might covet, and such as Shakspere did enjoy in his early rambles.

Through these pleasant places would the boy William Shakspere walk hand in hand with his father, or wander at his own free will with his school companions. All the simple processes of farming life would be familiar to him. The profitable mysteries of modern agriculture would not embarrass his youthful experience. He would witness none of that anxious diligence which compels the earth to yield double crops, and places little reliance upon the unassisted operations of nature. The seed-time and the harvest in the corn-fields, the gathering-in of the thin grass on the uplands and of the ranker produce of the flooded meadows, the folding of the flocks on the hills, the sheep-shearing, would seem to him like the humble and patient waiting of man upon a bounteous Providence. There would be no systematic rotation of crops to make him marvel at the skill of the cultivator. Implements most skilfully adapted for the saving of animal labour would be unknown to him. The rude plough of his Saxon ancestors would be dragged along by a powerful team of sturdy oxen ; the sound of the flail alone would be heard in the barn. Around him would, however, be the glad indications of plenty. The farmer would have abundant stacks, and beeves, and kine, though the supply would fail in precarious seasons, when price did not regulate consumption ; he would brew his beer and bake his rye-bread ; his swine would be fattening on the beech-mast and the acorns of the tree wood ; his skeps of bees would be numerous in his garden ; the colewort would sprout from spring to winter for his homely meal, and in the fruitful season the strawberry would present its much coveted luxury. The old orchard would be rich with the choicest apples, grafts from the curious monastic varieties ; the rarer fruits from southern climates would be almost wholly unknown. There would be no niggard economy defeating itself ; the stock, such as it was would be of the best, although no Bakewell had arisen to preside over its improvement :—

> "Let carren and barren be shifted away,
> For best is the best, whatsoever ye pay." *

* Tusser, chapter xvi.

William Shakspere would go out with his father on a Michaelmas morning, and the fields would be busy with the sowing of rye and white wheat and barley. The apples and the walnuts would be then gathered; honey and wax taken from the hives; timber would be felled, sawn, and stacked for seasoning. In the solitary fields, then, would stand the birdkeeper with his bow. As winter approached would come what Tusser calls "the slaughter-time," the killing of sheep and bullocks for home consumption; the thresher would be busy now and then for the farmer's family, but the wheat for the baker would lie in sheaf. No hurrying then to market for fear of a fall in price; there is abundance around, and the time of stint is far off. The simple routine was this:—

> "In spring-time we rear, we do sow, and we plant;
> In summer get victuals, lest after we want.
> In harvest we carry in corn, and the fruit,
> In winter to spend, as we need of each suit."*

The joyous hospitality of Christmas had little fears that the stock would be prematurely spent; and whilst the mighty wood-fire blazed in the hall to the mirth of song and carol, neighbours went from house to house to partake of the abundance, and the poor were fed at the same board with the opulent. As the frost breaks, the labourer is again in the fields; hedging and ditching are somewhat understood, but the whole system of drainage is very rude. With such agriculture man seems to have his winter sleep as well as the earth. But nature is again alive; spring corn is to be sown; the ewes and lambs are to be carefully tended; the sheep, now again in the fields, are to be watched, for there are hungry "mastiffs and mongrels" about; the crow and pie are to be destroyed in their nests ere they are yet feathered; trees are to be barked before timber is fallen. Then comes the active business of the dairy, and, what to us would be a strange sight, the lambs have been taken from their mothers, and the ewes are milked in the folds. May demands the labour of the weed-hook; no horse-hoeing in those simple days. There are the flax and hemp too to be sown to supply the ceaseless labour of the spinner's wheel; bees are to be swarmed; and herbs are to be stored for the housewife's still. June brings its sheep-washing and shearing; with its haymaking, where the farmer is captain in the field, presiding over the bottles and the wallets, from the hour when the dew is dry to set of sun. Bustle is there now to get "grist to the mill," for the streams are drying, and if the meal be wanting how shall the household be fed? The harvest-time comes; the reapers cry "largess" for their gloves; the tithe is set out for "Sir Parson;" and then, after the poor have gleaned, and the cattle have been turned in "to mouth up" what is left,

> "In harvest-time, harvest folk, servants and all,
> Should make, all together, good cheer in the hall;
> And fill out the black bowl of blythe to their song,
> And let them be merry all harvest-time long."†

Such was the ancient farmer's year, which Tusser has described with wonderful spirit even to the minutest detail; and such were the operations of husbandry that the boy Shakspere would have beheld with interest amidst his native corn-fields and pastures. When the boy became deep-thoughted he would perceive that many things were ill undertood, and most operations indifferently carried through. He would hear of dearth and sickness, and he would seek to know the causes. But that time was not as yet.

The poet who has delineated human life and character under every variety of passion and humour, must have had some early experience of mankind. The

* Tusser, chapter xxiv. † Ibid. chapter xlvii.

loftiest imagination must work upon the humblest materials. In his father's home, amongst his father's neighbours, he would observe those striking differences in the tempers and habits of mankind which are obvious even to a child. Cupidity would be contrasted with generosity, parsimony with extravagance. He would hear of injustice and of ingratitude, of uprightness and of fidelity. Curiosity would lead him to the bailiff's court; and there he would learn of bitter quarrels and obstinate enmities, of friends parted "on a dissension of a doit," of foes who "interjoin their issues" to worry some wretched offender. Small ambition and empty pride would grow bloated upon the pettiest distinctions; and "the insolence of office" would thrust humility off the causeway. There would be loud talk of loyalty and religion, while the peaceful and the pious would be suspected; and the sycophant who wore the great man's livery would strive to crush the independent in spirit. Much of this the observing boy would see, but much also would be concealed in the general hollowness that belongs to a period of inquietude and change. The time would come when he would penetrate into the depths of these things; but meanwhile what was upon the surface would be food for thought. At the weekly market there would be the familiar congregation of buyers and sellers. The housewife from her little farm would ride in gallantly between her panniers laden with butter, eggs, chickens, and capons. The farmer would stand by his pitched corn, and, as Harrison complains, if the poor man handled the sample with the intent to purchase his humble bushel, the man of many sacks would declare that it was sold. The engrosser, according to the same authority, would be there with his understanding nod, successfully evading every statute that could be made against forestalling, because no statutes could prevail against the power of the best price. There, before shops were many, and their stocks extensive, would come the dealers from Birmingham and Coventry, with wares for use and wares for show,—horse-gear and women-gear, Sheffield whittles, and rings with posies. At the joyous Fair-season it would seem that the wealth of a world was emptied into Stratford; not only the substantial things, the wine, the wax, the wheat, the wool, the malt, the cheese, the clothes, the napery, such as even great lords sent their stewards to the fairs to buy,* but every possible variety of such trumpery as fill the pedlar's pack,—ribbons, inkles, caddises, coifs, stomachers, pomanders, brooches, tapes, shoe-ties. Great dealings were there on these occasions in beeves and horses, tedious chafferings, stout affirmations, saints profanely invoked to ratify a bargain. A mighty man rides into the fair who scatters consternation around. It is the Queen's Purveyor. The best horses are taken up for her Majesty's use, at her Majesty's price; and they probably find their way to the Earl of Leicester's or the Earl of Warwick's stables at a considerable profit to Master Purveyor. The country buyers and sellers look blank; but there is no remedy. There is solace, however, if there is not redress. The ivy-bush is at many a door, and the sounds of merriment are within, as the ale and the sack are quaffed to friendly greetings. In the streets there are morris-dancers, the juggler with his ape, and the minstrel with his ballads. We can imagine the foremost in a group of boys listening to the "small popular music sung by these *cantabanqui* upon benches and barrels' heads," or more earnestly to some one of the "blind harpers, or such-like tavern minstrels, that give a fit of mirth for a groat; their matters being for the most part stories of old time, as 'The Tale of Sir Topas,' 'Bevis of Southampton,' 'Guy of Warwick,' 'Adam Bell and Clymme of the Clough,' and such other old romances or historical rhymes, made purposely for the recreation of the common people."† A bold fellow, who is full of queer stories and cant phrases, strikes a few notes upon his gittern, and the lads and

* See the "Northumberland Household Book."

† Puttenham's "Art of Poetry," 1589.

lasses are around him ready to dance their country measures. He is thus described in the year 1564, in a tract by William Bulleyn: "Sir, there is one lately come into this hall, in a green Kendal coat, with yellow hose, a beard of the same colour, only upon the upper lip; a russet hat, with a great plume of strange feathers, and a brave scarf about his neck, in cut buskins. He is playing at the trey-trip with our host's son: he playeth trick upon the gittern, and dances 'Trenchmore' and 'Heie de Gie,' and telleth news from Terra Florida." Upon this strange sort of indigenous troubadour would the schoolboy gaze, for he would seem to belong to a more knowing race than dwelt on Avon's side. His "news from Terra Florida" tells us of an age of newstongues, before newspapers were. Doubtless such as he had many a story of home wonders; he had seen London perhaps; he could tell of Queens and Parliaments; might have seen a noble beheaded, or a heretic burnt; he could speak, we may fancy, of the wonders of the sea; of ships laden with rich merchandize, unloading in havens far from this inland region; of other ships wrecked on inhos-

[The Fair.]

pitable coasts, and poor men made rich by the ocean's spoils. At the fair, too, would be the poor old minstrel, with his gown of Kendal green, not tattered though somewhat tarnished. The harp laid by his side upon the bench tells his profession. There was a time when he was welcomed at every hall, and he might fitly wear starched ruffs, and a chain of pewter as bright as silver, and have the rest of his harp jauntily suspended by a green lace. Those times are past. He scarcely now dares to enter worshipful men's houses; and at the fairs a short song of love or good fellowship, or a dance to the gittern, are preferred by most to his tedious

legends. For many a long "fitte" had he, which told of doughty deeds of Arthur and his chivalry, Sir Bevis, Sir Gawain, Sir Launfal, and Sir Isenbras; and, after he had preluded with his harp, the minstrel would begin each in stately wise with "Listen, lordings, and hold you still," or "Listen to me a little stond." He might maunder on, neglected by most, though one youth might treasure up his words. There are many traces in the works of Shakspere of his familiarity with old romances and old ballads; but like all his other acquirements, there is no reproduction of the same thing under a new form. Rowe fancied that Shakspere's knowledge of the learned languages was but small, because "it is without controversy that in his works we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients." It is for inferior men to imitate. It was for Shakspere to subject his knowledge to his original power of thought, so that his knowledge and his invention should become "one entire and perfect chrysolite;" and thus the minute critic, who desires to find the classical jewels set in the English gold, proclaims that they are not there, *because* they were unknown and unappreciated by the uneducated poet. So of the traditionary lore with which Shakspere must have been familiar from his very boyhood. That lore is not in his writings in any very palpable shape, but its spirit is there. The simplicity, the vigour, the pathos, the essential dramatic power, of the ballad poetry stood out in Shakspere's boyhood in remarkable contrast to the drawling pedantry of the moral plays of the early stage. The ballads kept the love and the knowledge of real poetry in the hearts of the people. There was something high, and generous, and tolerant, in those which were most popular; something which demonstratively told they belonged to a nation which admired courage, which loved truth, which respected misfortune. Percy, speaking of the more ancient ballad of "Chevy Chase," says—"One may also observe a generous impartiality in the old original bard, when in the conclusion of his tale he represents both nations as quitting the field without any reproachful reflection on either; though he gives to his own countrymen the credit of being the smaller number." The author of that ballad was an Englishman; and we may believe this "impartiality" to have been an ingredient of the old English patriotism. At any rate it entered into the patriotism of Shakspere.

[The Boundary Elm, Stratford.]

CHAPTER VI.

HOLIDAYS.

It is the twenty-third of April, and the birthday of William Shakspere is a general holiday at Stratford. It is St. George's day. There is high feasting at Westminster or at Windsor. The green rushes are strewn in the outward courts of the Palace; the choristers lift up the solemn chants of the Litany as a procession advances from the Queen's Hall to her Chapel; the Heralds move on gorgeously in their coat-armour; the Knights of the Garter and the Sovereign glitter in their velvet robes; the Yeomen of the Guard close round in their richest liveries.* At Stratford there is humbler pageantry. Upon the walls of the Chapel of the Holy Cross there was a wondrous painting of a terrible dragon pierced through the neck with a spear; but he has snapped the weapon in two with his fearful talons, and a gallant knight in complete armour is uplifting his sword, whilst the bold horse which he bestrides rushes upon the monster with his pointed champfrein :† in the background is a crowned lady with a lamb; and on distant towers a king and queen watching the combat. This story of Saint George and the delivery of the Princess of Silene from the power of the dragon was, on the twenty-third of April, wont to be dramatized at Stratford. From the altar of Saint George was annually taken down an ancient

* See Nichols's "Progresses of Elizabeth," vol. i., p. 88.

† The armour for the horse's head, with a long projecting spike, so as to make the horse resemble an unicorn.

suit of harness, which was duly scoured and repaired; and from some storehouse was produced the figure of a dragon, which had also all needful annual reparation. Upon the back of a sturdy labourer was the harness fitted, and another powerful man had to bear the dragon, into whose body he no doubt entered. Then, all the dignitaries of the town being duly assembled, did Saint George and the Dragon march along, amidst the ringing of bells and the firing of chambers, and the shout of the patriotic population of "Saint George for England."* Here is the simplest of dramatic exhibitions, presented through a series of years to the observing eyes of a boy in whom the dramatic power of going out of himself to portray some incident, or character, or passion with incomparable truth, was to be developed and matured in the growth of his poetical faculty. As he looked upon that rude representation of a familiar legend, he may first have conceived the capability of exhibiting to the eye a moving picture of events, and of informing it with life by appropriate dialogue. But in truth the essentially dramatic spirit of the ancient church had infused itself thoroughly into the popular mind; and thus, long after the Reformation had swept away most of the ecclesiastical ceremonials that were held to belong to the superstitions of Popery, the people retained this principle of *personation* in their common festivals; and many were the occasions in which the boy and the man, the maiden and the matron were called upon to enact some part, that might require bodily activity and mental readiness; in which something of grace and even of dignity might be called forth; in which a free but good-tempered wit might command the applause of uncritical listeners; and a sweet or mellow voice, pouring forth our nation's songs, would receive the exhilarating homage of a jocund chorus. Let us follow the boy William Shakspere, now, we will suppose, some ten or eleven years old, through the annual course of the principal rustic holidays, in which the yeoman and the peasant, the tradesman and the artisan, with their wives and children, were equally ready to partake. We may discover in these familiar scenes not only those peculiar forms of a dramatic spirit in real manners which might in some degree have given a direction to his genius, but, what is perhaps of greater importance, that poetical aspect of common life which was to supply materials of thought and of imagery to him who was to become in the most eminent degree the poet of humanity in all its imaginative relations.

The festivities of Christmas are over. The opening year calls the husbandman again to his labours; and Plough Monday, with its plough dragged along to rustic music, and its sword-dance, proclaims that wassail must give place to work. The rosemary and the bays, the mistletoe and the holly, are removed from the porch and the hall, and the delicate leaves of the box are twined into the domestic garland.† The Vigil of Saint Agnes has rewarded or disappointed the fateful charm of the village maiden. The husbandman has noted whether Saint Paul's day "be fair and clear," to guide his presages of the year's fertility. "Cupid's Kalendere" has been searched on the day of "Seynte Valentine," as Lydgate tells. The old English chorus, which Shakspere himself has preserved, has been duly sung—

> "'T is merry in hall, when beards wag all,
> And welcome merry Shrove-tide."

Easter is come, after a season of solemnity. The ashes were no longer blessed at the beginning of Lent, nor the palms borne at the close; yet there was strong devotion in the reformed church—real penitence and serious contemplation. But

* It appears from accounts which are given in fac-simile in Fisher's Work on the Chapel of the Guild that this procession repeatedly took place in the reign of Henry VIII.; and other accounts show that it was continued as late as 1579.

† Herrick.

the day of gladness arrives—a joy which even the great eye of the natural world was to make manifest. Surely there was something exquisitely beautiful in the old custom of going forth into the fields before the sun had risen on Easter-day, to see him mounting over the hills with a tremulous motion, as if it were an animate thing bounding in sympathy with the redeemed of mankind. The young poet might have joined his simple neighbours on this cheerful morning, and yet have thought with Sir Thomas Browne, "We shall not, I hope, disparage the Resurrection of our Redeemer if we say that the sun doth *not* dance on Easter-day." But one of the most glorious images of one of his early plays has given life and movement to the sun:—

> "Night's candles are burnt out, and *jocund* day
> Stands *tiptoe* on the misty mountain's tops.

Saw he not the sun dance—heard he not the expression of the undoubting belief that the sun danced—as he went forth into Stratford meadows in the early twilight of Easter-day?

On the road to Henley-in-Arden, about two or three hundred yards from the house in Henley Street where John Shakspere once dwelt, there stood, when this Biography was first written, a very ancient boundary-tree—an elm which is recorded in a Presentment of the Perambulation of the boundaries of the Borough of Stratford, on the 7th of April, 1591, as "The Elme at the Dovehouse-Close end."* The boundary from that elm in the Henley road continued in another direction to "the two elms in Evesham highway." Such are the boundaries of the borough at this day. At a period, then, when it was usual for the boys of Grammar Schools to attend the annual perambulations in Rogation-week of the clergy, the magistrates and public officers, and the inhabitants, of parishes and towns,† would William Shakspere be found, in gleeful companionship, under this old boundary elm. There would be assembled the parish priest and the schoolmaster, the bailiff and the churchwardens. Banners would wave, poles crowned with garlands would be carried by old and young. Under each *Gospel-tree*, of which this Dovehouse-Close Elm would be one, a passage from Scripture would be read, a collect recited, a psalm sung. With more pomp at the same season might the Doge of Venice espouse the Sea in testimony of the perpetual domination of the Republic, but not with more heartfelt joy than these the people of Stratford traced the boundaries of their little sway. The Reformation left us these parochial processions. In the 7th year of Elizabeth (1565) the form of devotion for the "Rogation days of Procession" was prescribed, "without addition of any superstitious ceremonies heretofore used;" and it was subsequently ordered that the curate on such occasions "shall admonish the people to give thanks to God in the beholding of God's benefits," and enforce the scriptural denouncements against those who removed their neighbours' landmarks. Beautifully has Walton described how Hooker encouraged these annual ceremonials:—"He would by no means omit the customary time of procession, persuading all, both rich and poor, if they desired the preservation of love and their parish rights and liberties, to accompany him in his perambulation; and most did so; in which perambulation he would usually express more pleasant discourse than at other times, and would then always drop some loving and facetious observations, to be remembered against the next year, especially by the boys and young people; still inclining them, and all his present parishioners, to meekness and mutual kindnesses and love, because love thinks not evil, but covers a multitude of infirmities." And so, perhaps, listening to the gentle words of some venerable Hooker of his time, would the young Shakspere walk the bounds of his native parish. One day would not suffice

* The original is in the possession of R. Wheler, Esq., of Stratford.

† See Brand's "Popular Antiquities," by Sir H. Ellis, edit. 1841, vol. i., p. 123.

to visit its numerous Gospel-trees. Hours would be spent in reconciling differences amongst the cultivators of the common-fields; in largesses to the poor; in merry-making at convenient halting-places. A wide parish is this of Stratford, including eleven villages and hamlets. A district of beautiful and varied scenery is this parish—hill and valley, wood and water. Following the Avon upon the north bank, against the stream, for some two miles, the processionists would walk through low and fertile meadows, unenclosed pastures then in all likelihood. A little brook falls into the river, coming down from the marshy uplands of Ingon, where, in spite of modern improvement, the frequent bog attests the accuracy of Dugdale's description—"Inge signifyeth in our old English a meadow or low ground." The brook is traced upwards into the hills of Welcombe; and then for nearly three miles from Welcombe Greenhill the boundary lies along a wooded ridge, opening prospects of surpassing beauty. There may the distant spires of Coventry be seen peeping above the intermediate hills, and the nearer towers of Warwick lying cradled in their surrounding woods. In another direction a cloud-like spot in the extreme distance is the far-famed Wrekin; and turning to the north-west are the noble hills of Malvern, with their well-defined outlines. The Cotswolds lock-in the landscape on another side; while in the middle distance the bold Bredon-hill looks down upon the vale of Evesham. All around is a country of unrivalled fertility, with now and then a plain of considerable extent; but more commonly a succession of undulating hills, some wood-crowned, but all cultivated. At the northern extremity of this high land, which principally belongs to the estate of Clopton, and which was doubtless a park in early times, we have a panoramic view of the valley in which Stratford lies, with its hamlets of Bishopton, Little Wilmecote, Shottery, and Drayton. As the marvellous boy of the Stratford grammar-school looked upon that plain, how little could he have foreseen the course of his future life! For twenty years of his manhood he was to have no constant dwelling-place in that his native town; but it was to be the home of his affections. He would be gathering fame and opulence in an almost untrodden path, of which his young ambition could shape no definite image; but in the prime of his life he was to bring his wealth to his own Stratford, and become the proprietor and the contented cultivator of some of the loved fields that he now saw mapped out at his feet. Then, a little while, and an early tomb under that gray tower—a tomb so to be honoured in all ages to come,

"That kings for such a tomb would wish to die."

For some six miles the boundary runs from north to south, partly through land which was formerly barren, and still known as Drayton Bushes and Drayton Wild Moor. Here,

"Far from her nest the lapwing cries away."*

The green bank of the Avon is again reached at the western extremity of the boundary, and the pretty hamlet of Luddington, with its cottages and old trees standing high above the river sedges, is included. The Avon is crossed where the Stour unites with it; and the boundary extends considerably to the south-east, returning to the town over Clopton's Bridge.

Shottery, the prettiest of hamlets, is scarcely a mile from Stratford. Here, in all probability dwelt one who in a few years was to have an important influence upon the destiny of the boy-poet. A Court Roll of the 34th Henry VIII. (1543) shows us that John Hathaway then resided at Shottery; and the substantial house which the Hathaways possessed, now divided into several cottages, remained with their descendants till the very recent period of 1838. There were Hathaways, also, living

* "Comedy of Errors."

in the town of Stratford, contemporaries of John Shakspere. We cannot say, absolutely, that Anne Hathaway, the future wife of William Shakspere, was of Shottery; but the prettiest of maidens (for the veracious antiquarian Oldys says there is a tradition that she was eminently beautiful) would have fitly dwelt in the pleasantest of hamlets. Pass the back of the cottage in which the Hathaways lived, and enter that beautiful meadow which rises into a gentle eminence commanding the hamlet at several points. Throw down the hedges, and there is here the fittest of localities for the May-games. An impatient group is gathered under the shade of the old elms, for the morning sun casts his slanting beams dazzlingly across that green. There is the distant sound of tabor and bagpipe :—

"Hark, hark! I hear the dancing,
And a nimble morris prancing;
The bagpipe and the morris bells,
That they are not far hence us tells." *

From out of the leafy Arden are they bringing in the May-pole. The oxen move slowly with the ponderous wain: they are garlanded, but not for the sacrifice. Around the spoil of the forest are the pipers and the dancers—maidens in blue kirtles, and foresters in green tunics. Amidst the shouts of young and old, childhood leaping and clapping its hands, is the May-pole raised. But there are great personages forthcoming—not so great, however, as in more ancient times. There are Robin Hood and Little John, in their grass-green tunics; but their bows and their sheaves of arrows are more for show than use. Maid Marian is there; but she is a mockery—a smooth-faced youth in a watchet-coloured tunic, with flowers and coronets, and a mincing gait, but not the shepherdess who

"With garlands gay
Was made the lady of the May." †

There is farce amidst the pastoral. The age of unrealities has already in part arrived. Even amongst country-folks there is burlesque. There is personation, with a laugh at the things that are represented. The Hobby-horse and the Dragon, however, produce their shouts of merriment. But the hearty Morris-dancers soon spread a spirit of genial mirth amidst all the spectators. The clownish Maid Marian will now

"Caper upright like a wild Morisco:" ‡

Friar Tuck sneaks away from his ancient companions to join hands with some undisguised maiden; the Hobby-horse gets rid of his pasteboard and his foot-cloth; and the Dragon quietly deposits his neck and tail for another season. Something like the genial chorus of "Summer's Last Will and Testament" is rung out :—

"Trip and go, heave and ho,
Up and down, to and fro,
From the town to the grove,
Two and two, let us rove,
A Maying, a playing;
Love hath no gainsaying:
So merrily trip and go."

The early-rising moon still sees the villagers on that green of Shottery. The piper leans against the May-pole; the featliest of dancers still swim to his music :—

"So have I seen
Tom Piper stand upon our village green,
Back'd with the May-pole, whilst a jocund crew
In gentle motion circularly threw
Themselves around him." §

* Weelkes's "Madrigals," 1600. † Nicholas Breton. ‡ "Henry VI.," Part II.
§ Browne's "Britannia's Pastorals," Book ii. Second Song.

The same beautiful writer—one of the last of our golden age of poetry—has described the parting gifts bestowed upon the "merry youngsters" by

"The lady of the May
Set in an arbour, (on a holy-day,)
Built by the May-pole, where the jocund swains
Dance with the maidens to the bagpipe's strains,
When envious night commands them to be gone." *

[Shottery.]

Eight villages in the neighbourhood of Stratford have been characterized in well-known lines by some old resident who had the talent of rhyme. It is remarkable how familiar all the country-people are to this day with these lines, and how invariably they ascribe them to Shakspere :—

"Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hilborough, hungry Grafton,
Dudging† Exhall, Papist Wicksford,
Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford."

It is maintained that these epithets have a real historical truth about them ; and

* Browne's "Britannia's Pastorals," Book ii. Fourth Song.
† Sulky, stubborn, in dudgeon.

so we must place the scene of a Whitsun-Ale at Bidford. Aubrey has given a sensible account of such a festivity:—"There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather's days; but for Kingston St. Michael (no small parish) the Church-Ale of Whitsuntide did the business. In every parish is, or was, a church-house, to which belonged spits, crocks, &c., utensils for dressing provision. Here the housekeepers met and were merry, and gave their charity. The young people were there, too, and had dancing, bowling, shooting at butts, &c., the ancients sitting gravely by and looking on. All things were civil, and without scandal."* The puritan Stubbs took a more severe view of the matter than Aubrey's grandfather:—"In certain towns where drunken Bacchus bears sway, against Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide, or some other time, the churchwardens of every parish, with the consent of the whole parish, provide half a score or twenty quarters of malt, whereof some they buy of the church-stock, and some is given them of the parishioners themselves, every one conferring somewhat, according to his ability; which malt, being made into very strong ale or beer, is set to sale, either in the church or some other place assigned to that purpose. Then, when this is set abroach, well is he that can get the soonest to it, and spend the most at it."† Carew, the historian of Cornwall, (1602), says, "The neighbour parishes at those times lovingly visit one another, and this way frankly spend their money together." Thus lovingly might John Shakspere and his friends, on a Whit-Monday morning, have ridden by the pleasant road to Bidford—now from some little eminence beholding their Avon flowing amidst a low meadow on one side and a wood-crowned steep on the other, turning a mill-wheel, rushing over a dam—now carefully wending their way

[Bidford Bridge.]

through the rough road under the hill, or galloping over the free downs, glad to escape from rut and quagmire. And then the Icknield Street‡ is crossed,

* "Miscellanies." † "Anatomy of Abuses," 1585.

‡ The Roman way which runs near Bidford.

and they look down upon the little town with its gabled roofs; and they pass the old church, whose tower gives forth a lusty peal; and the hostel at the bridge receives them; and there is the cordial welcome, the outstretched hand and the full cup.

But nearer home Whitsuntide has its sports also. Had not Stratford its "Lord of Whitsuntide?" Might not the boy behold at this season innocence wearing a face of freedom like his own Perdita?—

> "Come take your flowers:
> Methinks, I play as I have seen them do
> In Whitsun pastorals."*

Would there not be in some cheerful mansion a simple attempt at dramatic representation, such as his Julia has described in her assumed character of a page?—

> "At Pentecost,
> When all our pageants of delight were play'd,
> Our youth got me to play the woman's part;
> And I was trimm'd in madam Julia's gown;
> Which served me as fit, in all men's judgments,
> As if the garment had been made for me:
> Therefore I know she is about my height.
> And at that time I made her weep a-good,
> For I did play a lamentable part:
> Madam, 'twas Ariadne, passioning
> For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight."†

Certainly on that holiday some one would be ready to recite a moving tale from Gower or from Chaucer—a fragment of the "Confessio Amantis" or of the "Troilus and Creseide:"—

> "It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves, and holy-ales."‡

The elements of poetry would be around him; the dramatic spirit of the people would be struggling to give utterance to its thoughts, and even then he might cherish the desire to lend it a voice.

The sheep-shearing—that, too, is dramatic. Drayton, the countryman of our poet, has described the shepherd-king:—

> "But, Muse, return to tell how there the shepherd-king,
> Whose flock hath chanc'd that year the earliest lamb to bring,
> In his gay baldric sits at his low grassy board,
> With flawns, curds, clouted cream, and country dainties stor'd:
> And, whilst the bagpipe plays, each lusty jocund swain
> Quaffs syllabubs in cans to all upon the plain;
> And to their country girls, whose nosegays they do wear,
> Some roundelays do sing,—the rest the burden bear."§

The vale of Evesham is the scene of Drayton's sheep-shearing. But higher up the Avon there are rich pastures; and shallow bays of the clear river, where the washing may be accomplished. Such a bay, so used, is there near the pretty village of Alveston, about two miles above Stratford. One of the most delicious scenes of the "Winter's Tale" is that of the sheep-shearing, in which we have the more poetical shepherd-*queen*. There is a minuteness of circumstance amidst the exquisite poetry of this scene which shows that it must have been founded upon actual observation, and in all likelihood upon the keen and prying observation of a boy

* "Winter's Tale," Act IV., Scene III.
† "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Act IV., Scene III.
‡ "Pericles," Act I.
§ "Polyolbion," Song XIV.

occupied and interested with such details. Surely his father's pastures and his father's homestead might have supplied all these circumstances. His father's man might be the messenger to the town, and reckon upon "counters" the cost of the sheep-shearing feast. "Three pound of sugar, five pound of currants, rice"—and then he asks, "What will this sister of mine do with rice?" In Bohemia, the clown might, with dramatic propriety, not know the use of rice at a sheep-shearing; but a Warwickshire swain would have the flavour of cheese-cakes in his mouth at the first mention of rice and currants. Cheese-cakes and warden-pies were the sheep-shearing delicacies. How absolutely true is the following picture:—

> "Fie, daughter! when my old wife liv'd, upon
> This day she was both pantler, butler, cook;
> Both dame and servant: welcom'd all, serv'd all:
> Would sing her song, and dance her turn; now here
> At upper end o' the table, now i' the middle;
> On his shoulder, and his: her face o' fire
> With labour; and the thing she took to quench it
> She would to each one sip."

This is the literal painting of a Teniers; but the same hand could unite the unrivalled grace of a Correggio. William Shakspere might have had some boyish dreams of a "mistress o' the feast," who might have suggested his Perdita; but such a creation is of higher elements than those of the earth. Such a bright vision is something more than "a queen of curds and cream."

The poet who says

> "Come, ho, and wake Diana with a hymn;
> With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
> And *draw her home with music*," *

had seen the Hock-Cart of the old harvest-home. It was the same that Paul Hentzner saw at Windsor in 1598: "As we were returning to our inn we happened to meet some country-people celebrating their Harvest-home. Their last load of corn they crown with flowers, having besides an image richly dressed, by which perhapst hey would signify Ceres. This they keep moving about, while men and women, men and maid-servants, riding through the streets in the cart, shout as loud as they can till they arrive at the barn." In the reign of James I., Moresin, another foreigner, saw a figure made of corn drawn home in a cart, with men and women singing to the pipe and the drum. And then Puritanism arose, to tell us that all such expressions of the heart were pagan and superstitious, relics of Popery, abominations of the Evil One. Robert Herrick, full of the old poetical feeling, sang the glories of the Hock-Cart in the time of Charles I.: but a severe religion, and therefore an unwise one, denounced all such festivals as the causes of debauchery; and so the debauchery alone remained with us. The music and the dancing were banished, but the strong drinks were left. Herrick tells us that the ceremonies of the Hock-Cart were performed "with great devotion." Assuredly they were. Devotion is that which knocks the worldly shackles off the spirit; strikes a spark out of our hard and dry natures; enforces the money-getter for a moment to forego his gain, and the penniless labourer to forget his hunger-satisfying toil. Devotion is that which brings the tear into the eye and makes the heart throb against the bosom, in silent forests where the doe gazes fearlessly upon the unaccustomed form of man, by rocks overhanging the sea, in the gorge of the mountains, in the cloister of the cathedral when the organ-peal comes and goes like the breath of flowers, in the crowded city when joyous multitudes shout by one impulse. Devotion lived

* "Merchant of Venice," Act v., Scene i.

amidst old ceremonials derived from a long antiquity; it waited upon the seasons; it hallowed the seed-time and the harvest, and made the frosts cheerful. And thus it grew into Religion. The feeling became a principle. But the formalists came, and required men to be devout without imagination; to have faith, rejecting tradition and authority, and all the genial impulses of love and reverence associated with the visible world,—the practical poetry of life, which is akin to faith. And so we are what we are, and not what God would have us to be.

We have retained Christmas; a starveling Christmas; one day of excessive eating for all ages, and Twelfth-cake for the children. It is something that relations meet on Christmas-day; that for one day in the year the outward shows of rivalry and jealousy are not visible; that the poor cousin puts on his best coat to taste port with his condescending host of the same name; that the portionless nieces have their annual guinea from their wealthy aunt. But where is the real festive exhilaration of Christmas; the meeting of all ranks as children of a common father; the tenant speaking freely in his landlord's hall; the labourers and their families sitting at the same great oak-table; the Yule Log brought in with shout and song?

"No night is now with hymn or carol blest." *

There are singers of carols even now at a Stratford Christmas. Warwickshire has retained some of its ancient carols. But the singers are wretched chorus-makers, according to the most unmusical style of all the generations from the time of the Commonwealth. There are no "three-man song-men" amongst them, no "means and basses;" there is not even "a Puritan" who "sings psalms to hornpipes."† They have retained such of the carols as will most provoke mockery:—

"Rise up, rise up, brother Dives,
And come along with me,
For you've a place provided in hell,
Upon a sarpant's knee."

And then the crowd laugh, and give their halfpennies. But in an age of music we may believe that one young dweller in Stratford gladly woke out of his innocent sleep, after the evening bells had rung him to rest, when in the stillness of the night the psaltery was gently touched before his father's porch, and he heard, one voice under another, these simple and solemn strains:—

"As Joseph was a-walking
He heard an angel sing,
This night shall be born
Our heavenly king.

He neither shall be born
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in the place of Paradise,
But in an ox's stall.

He neither shall be clothed
In purple nor in pall,
But all in fair linen,
As were babies all.

He neither shall be rock'd
In silver nor in gold,
But in a wooden cradle
That rocks on the mould."

London has perhaps this carol yet, amongst its halfpenny ballads. A man whose real vocation was mistaken in his busy time, for he had a mind attuned to the love of what was beautiful in the past, instead of being enamoured with the ugly disputations of the present, has preserved it;‡ but it was for another age. It was for the age of William Shakspere. It was for the age when superstition, as we call it, had its poetical faith:—

"Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,

* "Midsummer Night's Dream." † "Winter's Tale."
‡ William Hone's "Ancient Mysteries," p. 92.

This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm:
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time." *

Surely it is the poet himself who adds, in the person of Horatio,

"So have I heard, *and do in part believe it.*"

Such a night was a preparation for a "happy Christmas;"—the prayers of an earnest Church, the Anthem, the Hymn, the Homily. The cross of Stratford was garnished with the holly, the ivy, and the bay. Hospitality was in every house; but the hall of the great landlord of the parish was a scene of rare conviviality. The frost or the snow will not deter the principal friends and tenants from the welcome of Clopton. There is the old house, nestled in the woods, looking down upon the little town. Its chimneys are reeking; there is bustle in the offices; the sound of the trumpeters and the pipers is heard through the open door of the great entrance; the steward marshals the guests; the tables are fast filling. Then advance, courteously, the master and the mistress of the feast. The Boar's head is brought in with due solemnity; the wine-cup goes round; and perhaps the Saxon shout of Waes-hael and Drink-hael may still be shouted. The Lord of Misrule and the Mummers from Stratford are at the porch. Very sparing are the cues required for the enactment of this short drama. A speech to the esquire, closed with a merry jest; something about ancestry and good Sir Hugh; the loud laugh; the song and the chorus,—and the Lord of Misrule is now master of the feast.

* "Hamlet," Act I., Scene I.

[Clopton House.]

CHAPTER VII.

KENILWORTH.

Was William Shakspere at Kenilworth in that summer of 1575, when the great Dudley entertained Elizabeth with a splendour which annalists have delighted to record, and upon which one of our own days has bestowed a fame more imperishable than that of any annals? Percy, speaking of the old Coventry Hock-play, says, "Whatever this old play or storial show was at the time it was exhibited to Queen Elizabeth, it had probably our young Shakspere for a spectator, who was then in his twelfth year, and doubtless attended with all the inhabitants of the surrounding country at these 'princely pleasures of Kenilworth,' whence Stratford is only a few miles distant."* The preparations for this celebrated entertainment were on so magnificent a scale, the purveyings must have been so enormous, the posts so unintermitting, that there had needed not the flourishings of paragraphs (for the age of paragraphs was not as yet) to have roused the curiosity of all mid-England. Elizabeth had visited Kenilworth on two previous occasions,—in 1565, and in 1572.

Whether the boy Shakspere was at Kenilworth in 1575, when Robert Dudley welcomed his sovereign with a more than regal magnificence, is not necessary to be affirmed or denied. It is tolerably clear that the exquisite speech of Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is associated with some of the poetical devices which he might have there beheld, or have heard described :—

> "*Obe.* My gentle Puck, come hither: Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song;

* "On the Origin of the English Stage:"—Reliques, vol. i.

And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.
Puck I remember.
Obe. That very time I saw, (but thou couldst not,)
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd; a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west;
And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts:
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation fancy-free."

[Elizabeth.]

The most remarkable of the shows of Kenilworth were associated with the mythology and the romance of lakes and seas. "Triton, in likeness of a mermaid, came toward's the Queen's Majesty." "Arion appeared sitting on a dolphin's back." So the quaint and really poetical George Gascoigne, in his "Brief Rehearsal, or rather a true Copy of as much as was presented before her Majesty at Kenilworth." But the diffuse and most entertaining coxcomb Laneham describes a song of Arion with an ecstacy which may justify the belief that the "dulcet and harmonious breath" of "the sea-maid's music" might be the echo of the melodies heard by the young poet as he stood beside the lake at Kenilworth:—"Now, Sir, the ditty in metre so aptly endited to the matter, and after by voice deliciously delivered; the song, by a skilful artist into his parts so sweetly sorted; each part in his instrument so clean and sharply touched; every instrument again in his kind so excellently tunable; and this in the evening of the day, resounding from the calm

waters, where the presence of her Majesty, and longing to listen, had utterly damped all noise and din, the whole harmony conveyed in time, tune, and temper thus incomparably melodious; with what pleasure (Master Martin), with what sharpness of conceit, with what lively delight this might pierce into the hearers' hearts, I pray ye imagine yourself, as ye may." If Elizabeth be the "fair vestal throned by the west," of which there can be no reasonable doubt, the most appropriate scene of the mermaid's song would be Kenilworth, and "that very time" the summer of 1575.

Percy, believing that the boy Shakspere was at Kenilworth, has remarked, with his usual taste and judgment, that "the dramatic cast of many parts of that superb entertainment must have had a very great effect upon a young imagination, whose dramatic powers were hereafter to astonish the world." Without assuming with Percy that "our young bard gained admittance into the castle" on the evening when "after supper was there a play of a very good theme presented; but so set forth, by the actors' well handling, that pleasure and mirth made it seem very short, though it lasted two good hours and more;"* yielding not our consent to Tieck's fiction, that the boy performed the part of "Echo" in Gascoigne's address to the Queen, and was allowed to see the whole of the performances by the especial favour of her Majesty,—we may believe there were parts of that entertainment, which, without being a favoured spectator, William Shakspere with his friends might have beheld; and which "must have had a very great effect upon a young imagination,"

[Entrance to the Hall.]

* Laneham.

assisting, too, in giving it that dramatic tendency which, as we have endeavoured already to point out, was a peculiar characteristic of the simplest and the commonest festivals of his age.

And yet it is difficult to imagine anything more tedious than the fulsome praise, the mythological pedantries, the obscure allusions to Constancy and Deep-Desire, which were poured into the ears of Elizabeth during the nineteen days of Kenilworth. There was not, according to the historians of this visit, one fragment of our real old poetry produced, to gratify the Queen of a nation that had the songs and ballads of the chivalrous times still fresh upon its lips. There were no Minstrels at Kenilworth; the Harper was unbidden to its halls. The old English spirit of poetry was dead in a scheming court. It was something higher that in a few years called up Spenser and Shakspere. Yet there was one sport, emanating from the people, which had heart and reality in it. Laneham describes this as a "good sport presented in an historical cue by certain good-hearted men of Coventry, my lord's neighbours there." They "made petition that they might renew now their old storial show: of argument how the Danes, whilom here in a troublous season, were for quietness borne withal and suffered in peace; that anon, by outrage and unsupportable insolency, abusing both Ethelred the King, then, and all estates everywhere beside, at the grievous complaint and counsel of Huna, the King's chieftain in wars, on Saint Brice's night Anno Dom. 1012 (as the book says, that falleth yearly on the thirteenth of November), were all despatched, and the realm rid. And for because that the matter mentioneth how valiantly our Englishwomen, for love of their country, behaved themselves, expressed in action and rhymes after their manner, they thought it might move some mirth to her Majesty the rather. The thing, said they, is grounded in story, and for pastime wont to be played in our city yearly, without ill example of manners, papistry, or any superstition; and else did so occupy the heads of a number, that likely enough would have had worse meditations; had an ancient beginning and a long continuance, till now of late laid down, they knew no cause why, unless it was by the zeal of certain of their preachers, men very commendable for their behaviour and learning, and sweet in their sermons, but somewhat too sour in preaching away their pastime." The description by Laneham is the only precise account which remains to us of the "old storial show," the "sport presented in an historical cue." It was a show not to be despised; for it told the people how their Saxon ancestors had arisen to free themselves from "outrage and unsupportable insolency," and "how valiantly our Englishwomen, for love of their country, behaved themselves." Laneham, in his accustomed style, is more intent upon describing "Captain Cox," an odd man of Coventry, "mason, ale-conner, who hath great oversight in matters of story," than upon giving us a rational account of this spectacle. We find, however, that there were the Danish lance-knights on horseback, and then the English; that they had furious encounters with spear and shield, with sword and target; that there were footmen, who fought in rank and squadron; and that "twice the Danes had the better, but at the last conflict beaten down, overcome, and many led captive for triumph by our Englishwomen." The court historian adds,—"This was the effect of this show, that as it was handled made much matter of good pastime, brought all indeed into the great court, even under her Highness's window, to have seen." But her Highness, having pleasanter occupation within, "saw but little of the Coventry play, and commanded it therefore on the Tuesday following to have it full out, as accordingly it was presented." This repetition of the Hock-play in its completeness, full out, necessarily leads to the conclusion that the action was somewhat more complicated than the mere repetition of a mock-combat. Laneham, in his general description of the play, says, "expressed in action and rhymes." That he has preserved none of the rhymes, and has given

us a very insufficient account of the action, is characteristic of the man and of the tone of the courtiers. The Coventry clowns came there, not to call up any patriotic feeling by their old traditionary rhymes and dumb-show, but to be laughed at for their awkward movement and their earnest declamation. It appears to us that the conclusion is somewhat hasty which says of this play of Hock Tuesday, "It seems to have been merely a dumb-show."* Percy, resting upon the authority of Laneham, says that the performance "seems *on that occasion* to have been without recitation or rhymes, and *reduced* to mere dumb-show." Even this we doubt. But certainly it is difficult to arrive at any other conclusion than that of Percy, that the play, as originally performed by the men of Coventry, "expressed in action and rhymes after their manner,"—representing a complicated historical event,—the insolence of tyranny, the indignation of the oppressed, the grievous complaint of one injured chieftain, the secret counsels, the plots, the conflicts, the triumph,—must have offered us "a regular model of a complete drama." If the young Shakspere were a witness to the performance of this drama, his imagination would have been more highly and more worthily excited than if he had been the favoured spectator of all the shows of Tritons, and Dianas, and Ladies of the Lake that proceeded from "the conceit so deep in casting the plot" of his lordship of Leicester. It would be not too much to believe that this storial show might first suggest to him how English history might be dramatized; how a series of events, terminating in some remarkable catastrophe, might be presented to the eye; how fighting-men might be marshalled on a mimic field; how individual heroism might stand out from amongst the mass, having its own fit expression of thought and passion; how the wife or the mother, the sister or the mistress, might be there to uphold the hero, even as the Englishwomen assisted their warriors; and how all this might be made to move the hearts of the people, as the old ballads had once moved them. Such a result would have repaid a visit to Kenilworth by William Shakspere. Without this, he, his father, and their friends, might have retired from the scene of Dudley's magnificence, as most thinking persons in all probability retired, with little satisfaction. There was lavish expense; but, according to the most credible accounts, the possessor of Kenilworth was the oppressor of his district. We see him not delighting to show his Queen a happy tenantry, such as the less haughty and ambitious nobles and esquires were anxious to cultivate. The people came under the windows of Elizabeth as objects of ridicule. Slavish homage would be there to Leicester from the gentlemen of the county. They would replenish his butteries with their gifts; they would ride upon his errands; they would wear his livery. There was one gentleman in Warwickshire who would not thus do Leicester homage—Edward Arden, the head of the great house of Arden, the cousin of William Shakspere's mother. But the mighty favourite was too powerful for him: "Which Edward, though a gentleman not inferior to the rest of his ancestors in those virtues wherewith they were adorned, had the hard hap to come to an untimely death in 27 Eliz., the charge laid against him being no less than high treason against the Queen, as privy to some foul intentions that Master Somerville, his son-in-law (a Roman Catholic), had towards her person: For which he was prosecuted with so great rigour and violence, by the Earl of Leicester's means, whom he had irritated in some particulars (as I have credibly heard), partly in disdaining to wear his livery, which many in this county, of his rank, thought, in those days, no small honour to them; but chiefly for galling him by certain harsh expressions, touching his private accesses to the Countess of Essex before she was his wife; that through the testimony of one Hall, a priest, he was found guilty of the fact, and lost his life in Smithfield."† The Rev. N. J. Halpin,

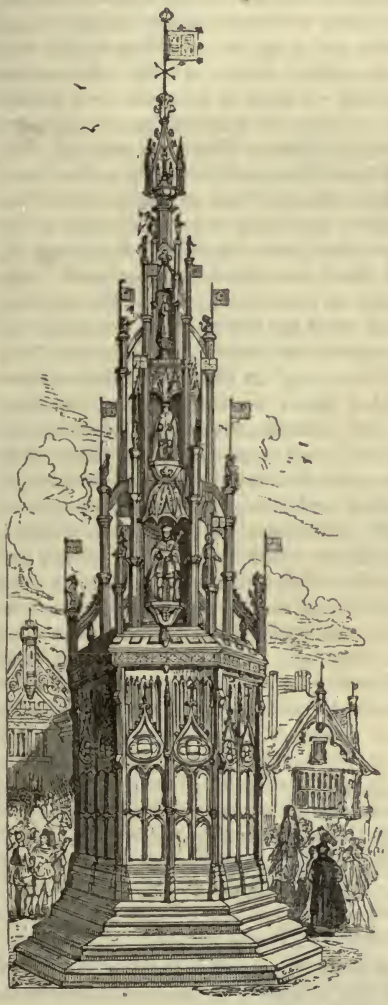
* Collier: "Annals of the Stage," vol. i., p. 234.
† Dugdale's "Warwickshire," p. 681.

who has contributed a most interesting tract to the publications of "The Shakespeare Society" on the subject of "Oberon's Vision in the Midsummer Night's Dream," has explained the allusions in that exquisite passage with far more success than the belief of Warburton that the Queen of Scots was pointed at, or of Mr. Boaden that Amy Robsart was the "little western flower." He considers that Edward Arden, a spectator of those very entertainments at Kenilworth, discovered Leicester's guilty "accesses to the Countess of Essex;" that the expression of Oberon, "That *very time*, I saw, but thou couldst not," referred to this discovery; that when "the Imperial Votaress passed on," he "marked where the bolt of Cupid fell;" that "the little western flower," pure, "milk-white" before that time, became spotted, "purple with love's wound." We may add that there is bitter satire in what follows—"that flower," retaining the original influence, "will make or man or woman madly dote," as Lettice, Countess of Essex, was infatuated by Leicester. The discovery of Edward Arden, and his "harsh expressions" concerning it, might be traditions in Shakspere's family, and be safely allegorized by the poet in 1594 when Leicester was gone to his account.

[Leicester.]

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGEANTS.



It is "the middle summer's spring." On the day before the feast of Corpus Christi all the roads leading to Coventry have far more than their accustomed share of pedestrians and horsemen. The pageants are to be acted to-morrow, and perhaps for the last time. The preachers in their sermons have denounced them again and again; but since the Queen's Majesty was graciously pleased with the Hock-play at Kenilworth, that ancient sport, so dear to the men of Coventry, has been revived, and the Guilds have struggled against the preachers to prevent their old pageants from being suppressed. And why, say they, should they be suppressed? Have not they, the men of the Guilds, been accustomed to act their own pageants long after the Gray Friars had gone into obscurity? Has not the good city all that is needful for their proper performance? Do not they all know their parts, as arranged by the town-clerk? Are not their robes in goodly order, some new, and all untattered? Moreover, is not the trade of the city greatly declined—its blue thread thrust out by thread brought from beyond sea—its caps and girdles superseded by gear from London;* and was not in the old time "the confluence of people from far and near to see this show extraordinary great, and yielded no small advantage to this city?"† The pageants shall be played in spite of the preachers; and so the bruit thereof goes through the country, and Coventry is still to see its accustomed crowds on the day of Corpus Christi.

It requires not the imagination of the romance-writer to assume that before William Shakspere was sixteen, that is, before the year 1580, when the pageants at Coventry, with one or two rare exceptions, were finally suppressed, he would be a spectator of one of these remarkable

* See "A Briefe Conceipte of English Pollicye," 1581. † Dugdale.

performances, which were in a few years wholly to perish; becoming, however, the foundations of a drama more suited to the altered spirit of the people, more universal in its range,—the drama of the laity, and not of the church. What a glorious city must Coventry have been in the days when that youth first looked upon it—the "Prince's Chamber," as it was called, the "third city of the realm," a "shire-town,"* full of stately buildings of great antiquity, unequalled once in the splendour of its monastic institutions, full of associations of regal state, and chivalry, and high events! As he finally emerges from the rich woodlands and the elm-groves which reach from Kenilworth, there would that splendid city lie before him, surrounded by its high wall and its numerous gates, its three wondrous spires, which he had often gazed upon from the hill of Welcombe, rising up in matchless height and symmetry, its famous cross towering above the gabled roofs. At the other extremity of the wall, gates more massive and defying—a place of strength, even though no conqueror of Cressy now dwelt therein—a place of magnificence, though the hand of spoliation had been there most busy. William Shakspere and his company ride through the gate of the Gray Friars, and they are presently in the heart of that city. Eager crowding is there already in those streets on that eve of Corpus Christi, for the waits are playing, and banners are hung out at the walls of the different Guilds. The citizens gathered round the Cross are eagerly discussing the particulars of to-morrow's show. Here and there one with a beetling brow indignantly denounces the superstitious and papistical observance; whilst the laughing smith or shearman, who is to play one of the magi on the morrow, describes the bravery of his new robe, and the lustre of his pasteboard crown that has been fresh gilded. The inns are full, "great and sumptuous inns," as Harrison describes those of this very day, "able to lodge two hundred or three hundred persons, and their horses, at ease, and thereto, with a very short warning, make such provision for their diet as to him that is unacquainted withal may seem to be incredible: And it is a world to see how each owner of them contendeth with other for goodness of entertainment of their guests, as about fineness and change of linen, furniture of bedding, beauty of rooms, service at the table, costliness of plate, strength of drink, variety of wines, or well using of horses." So there would be no lack of cheer; and the hundreds that have come into Coventry will be fed and lodged better even than in London, whose inns, as the same authority tells us, are the worst in the kingdom. Piping and dancing is there in the chambers, madrigals worth the listening. But silence and sleep at last fitly prepare for a busy day. Perhaps, however, a stray minstrel might find his way to this solemnity, and forget the hour in the exercise of his vocation, like the very ancient anonymous poet of the Alliterative Metre, whose manuscript, probably of the date of Henry V., has contrived to escape destruction:—

> "Ones y me ordayned, as y have ofte doon,
> With frendes, and felawes, frendemen, and other;
> And caught me in a company on Corpus Christi even,
> Six, other seven myle, oute of Suthampton,
> To take melodye, and mirthes, among my makes;
> With redyng of romaunces, and revelyng among,
> The dym of the darknesse drowe into the west,
> And began for to spryng in the gray day."†

The morning of Corpus Christi comes, and soon after sunrise there is stir in the streets of Coventry. The old ordinances for this solemnity required that the Guilds

* Coventry had altogether separate jurisdiction. It is called "a shire-town" by Dugdale, to mark this distinction.

† See Percy's "Reliques:" On the Alliterative Metre. We give the lines as corrected in Sharp's "Coventry Mysteries."

should be at their posts at five o'clock. There is to be a solemn procession—formerly, indeed, after the performance of the pageant—and then, with hundreds of torches burning around the figures of our Lady and St. John, candlesticks and chalices of silver, banners of velvet and canopies of silk, and the members of the Trinity Guild and the Corpus Christi Guild bearing their crucifixes and candlesticks, with personations of the angel Gabriel lifting up the lily, the twelve apostles, and renowned virgins, especially St. Catherine and St. Margaret. The Reformation has, of course destroyed much of this ceremonial; and, indeed, the spirit of it has in great part evaporated. But now, issuing from the many ways that lead to the Cross, there is heard the melody of harpers and the voice of minstrelsy; trumpets sound, banners wave, riding-men come thick from their several halls; the mayor and aldermen in their robes, the city servants in proper liveries, St. George and the Dragon, and Herod on horseback. The bells ring, boughs are strewed in the streets, tapestry is hung out of the windows, officers in scarlet coats struggle in the crowd while the procession is marshalling. The crafts are getting into their ancient order, each craft with its streamer and its men in harness. There are "Fysshers and Cokes,—Baxters and Milners,—Bochers,—Whittawers and Glovers,—Pynners, Tylers, and Wrightes,—Skynners,—Barkers,—Corvysers,—Smythes,—Weyers,—Wirdrawers,—Cardemakers, Sadelers, Peyntours, and Masons,—Gurdelers,—Taylours, Walkers, and Sherman,—Deysters,—Drapers,—Mercers."* At length the procession is arranged. It parades through the principal lines of the city, from Bishopgate on the north to the Gray Friars' Gate on the south, and from Broadgate on the west to Gosford Gate on the east. The crowd is thronging to the wide area on the north of Trinity Church, and St. Michael's, for there is the pageant to be first performed. There was a high house or carriage which stood upon six wheels; it was divided into two rooms, one above the other. In the lower room were the performers; the upper was the stage. This ponderous vehicle was painted and gilt, surmounted with burnished vanes and streamers, and decorated with imagery; it was hung round with curtains, and a painted cloth presented a picture of the subject that was to be performed. This simple stage had its machinery, too; it was fitted for the representation of an earthquake or a storm; and the pageant in most cases was concluded in the noise and flame of fireworks. It is the pageant of the company of Shearmen and Tailors which is now to be performed,—the subject the Birth of Christ and Offering of the Magi, with the flight into Egypt and Murder of the Innocents. The eager multitudes are permitted to crowd within a reasonable distance of the car. There is a moveable scaffold erected for the more distinguished spectators. The men of the Guilds sit firm on their horses. Amidst the sound of harp and trumpet the curtains are withdrawn, and Isaiah appears, prophesying the blessing which is to come upon the earth. Gabriel announces to Mary the embassage upon which he is sent from Heaven. Then a dialogue between Mary and Joseph, and the scene changes to the field where shepherds are abiding in the darkness of the night—a night so dark that they know not where their sheep may be; they are cold and in great heaviness. Then the star shines, and they hear the song of "Gloria in excelsis Deo." A soft melody of concealed music hushes even the whispers of the Coventry audience; and three songs are sung, such as may abide in the remembrance of the people, and be repeated by them at their Christmas festivals. "The first the shepherds sing:"—

"As I rode out this enders† night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright;
They sang terli terlow:
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow."

* Sharp's "Dissertation," page 160.

† *Enders night*—last night.

There is then a song "the women sing:"—

"Lully, lulla, you little tiny child;
By, by, lully, lullay, you little tiny child:
By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters two, how may we do
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling, for whom we do sing
By, by, lully, lullay?

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.

That woe is me, poor child, for thee,
And ever mourn and say,
For thy parting neither say nor sing
By, by, lully, lullay."

The shepherds again take up the song:—

"Down from heaven, from heaven so high,
Of angels there came a great company,
With mirth, and joy, and great solemnity:
They sang terly, terlow:
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can blow."

The simple melody of these songs has come down to us; they are part songs, each having the treble, the tenor, and the bass.* The star conducts the shepherds to the "crib of poor repast," where the child lies; and, with a simplicity which is highly characteristic, one presents the child his pipe, the second his hat, and the third his mittens. Prophets now come, who declare in lengthened rhyme the wonder and the blessing:—

"Neither in halls nor yet in bowers
Born would he not be,
Neither in castles nor yet in towers
That seemly were to see."

The messenger of Herod succeeds; and very curious it is, and characteristic of a period when the king's laws were delivered in the language of the Conqueror, that he speaks in French. This circumstance would carry back the date of the play to the reign of Edward III., though the language is occasionally modernized. We have then the three kings with their gifts. They are brought before Herod, who treats them courteously, but is inexorable in his cruel decree. Herod rages in the streets; but the flight into Egypt takes place, and then the massacre. The address of the women to the pitiless soldiers, imploring, defying, is not the least curious part of the performance; for example—

"Sir knightes, of your courtesy,
This day shame not your chivalry,
But on my child have pity,"

* This very curious Pageant, essentially different from the same portion of Scripture-history in the "*Ludus Coventriæ*," is printed entire in Mr Sharp's "Dissertation," as well as the score of these songs.

is the mild address of one mother. Another raves—

> "He that slays my child in sight,
> If that my strokes on him may light,
> Be he squire or knight,
> I hold him but lost."

The fury of a third is more excessive :—

> "Sit he never so high in saddle,
> But I shall make his brains addle,
> And here with my pot ladle
> With him will I fight."

We have little doubt that he who described the horrors of a siege,—

> "Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confus'd
> Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
> At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen."*—

had heard the howlings of the women in the Coventry pageant. And so "*fynes lude de taylars and scharmen.*"

And now the men of Coventry lead the way of the strangers to another spot, with the cry of "The Hock-play, the Hock-play!" There was yawning and ill-repressed laughing during the pageant, but the whole population now seems animated with a spirit of joyfulness. As one of the worthy aldermen gallantly presses his horse through the crowd, there is a cry, too, of "A Nycklyn, a Nycklyn!" for did not the excellent mayor, Thomas Nycklyn, three years ago, cause "Hock Tuesday, whereby is mentioned an overthrow of the Danes by the inhabitants of this city, to be again set up and showed forth, to his great commendation and the city's great commodity?"† In the wide area of the Cross-cheaping is the crowd now assembled. The strangers gaze upon "that stately Cross, being one of the chief things wherein this city most glories, which for workmanship and beauty is inferior to none in England."‡ It was not then venerable for antiquity, for it had been completed little more than thirty years; but it was a wondrous work of a gorgeous architecture, story rising above story, with canopies and statues, to a magnificent height, glittering with vanes upon its pinnacles, and now decorated with numerous streamers.§ Around the square are houses of most picturesque form; the balconies of their principal floors filled with gazers, and the windows immediately beneath the high-pitched roofs showing as many heads as could be thrust through the open casements. The area is cleared, for the play requires no scaffold. The English and the Danes marshal on opposite sides. There are fierce words and imprecations, shouts of defiance, whisperings of counsel. What is imperfectly heard or ill understood by the strangers is explained by those who are familiar with the show. There is no ridicule now; no laughing at Captain Cox, in his velvet cap, and flourishing his tonsword; all is gravity and exultation. Then come the women of Coventry, ardent in the cause of liberty, courageous, much enduring; and some one tells, in the pauses of the play, how there once rode into that square, in a death-like solitude and silence, a lady all naked, who, "bearing an extraordinary affection for this place, often and earnestly besought her husband that he would free it from

* "Henry V.," Act III., Scene III.

† Extract from manuscript Annals of Coventry in Sharp's "Dissertation," p. 129.

‡ Dugdale.

§ The Cross has perished, not through age, but by the hands of Common-councilmen and Commissioners of Pavement. The Turks broke up the Elgin marbles to make mortar for their Athenian hovels, and we call *them* barbarians.

that grievous servitude whereunto it was subject;"* and he telling her the hard conditions upon which her prayer should be granted,—

"She rode forth, clothed on with chastity."—(TENNYSON.)

Noble-hearted women such as the Lady Godiva were those of Coventry who assisted their husbands to drive out the Danes; and there they lead their captives in triumph; and the Hock-play terminates with song and chorus.

But the solemnities of the day are not yet concluded. In the space around Swine Cross, and near St. John's School, is another scaffold erected; not a lofty scaffold like that of the drapers and shearmen, but gay with painted cloths and ribbons. The pageant of "The Nine Worthies" is to be performed by the dramatic body of the Grammar School; the ancient pageant, such as was presented to Henry VI. and his Queen in 1455, and of which the Leet-book contains the faithful copy.† Assuredly there was one who witnessed that performance carefully employed in noting down the lofty speeches which the three Hebrews, Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabæus; the three Infidels, Hector, Alexander, and Julius Cæsar; and the three Christians, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Boulogne, uttered on that occasion. In the Coventry pageant Hector thus speaks:—

"Most pleasant princes, recorded that may be,
I, Hector of Troy, that am chief conqueror,
Lowly will obey you, and kneel on my knee."

And Alexander thus:—

"I, Alexander, that for chivalry beareth the ball,
Most courageous in conquest through the world am I named,—
Welcome you, princes."

And Julius Cæsar thus:—

"I, Julius Cæsar, sovereign of knighthood
And emperor of mortal man, most high and mighty,
Welcome you, princes most benign and good."

Surely it was little less than plagiary, if it was not meant for downright parody, when, in a pageant of "The Nine Worthies" presented a few years after, Hector comes in to say—

"The armipotent Mars, of lances the almighty,
Gave Hector a gift, the heir of Ilion:
A man so breath'd, that certain he would fight, yea,
From morn till night, out of his pavilion.
I am that flower."

And Alexander:—

"When in the world I liv'd, I was the world's commander;
By east, west, north, and south, I spread my conquering might:
My 'scutcheon plain declares that I am Alisander."

And Pompey, usurping the just honours of his triumphant rival:—

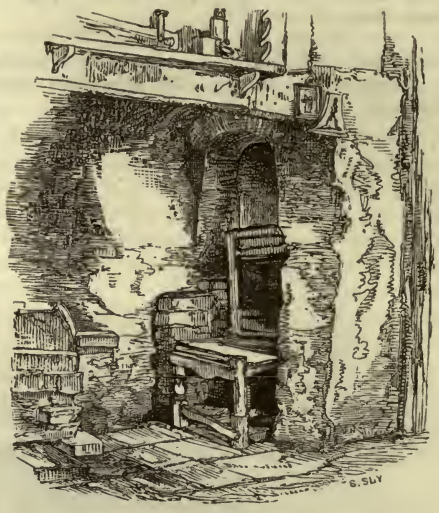
"I Pompey am, Pompey surnamed the great,
That oft in field, with targe and shield, did make my foe to sweat."

* Dugdale. † Sharp, page 145.

But the laugh of the parody was a harmless one. The Nine Worthies were utterly dead and gone in the popular estimation at the end of the century. Certainly in the crowd before St. John's School at Coventry there would be more than one who would laugh at the speeches—merry souls, ready to "play on the tabor to the Worthies, and let them dance the hay." *

* "Love's Labour's Lost," Act v. It is scarcely necessary to refer the reader to the same play for the speeches of Hector, Alexander, and Pompey. The coincidence between these and the old Coventry Pageant is remarkable.

[St. Mary's Hall, Coventry: Street Front.]



[Fireside in the House in Henley Street.]

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRESIDE.

THE happy days of boyhood are nearly over. William Shakspere no longer looks for the close of the day when, in that humble chamber in Henley Street, his father shall learn something of his school progress, and hear him read some English book of history or travel,—volumes which the active presses of London had sent cheaply amongst the people. The time is arrived when he has quitted the free-school. His choice of a worldly occupation is scarcely yet made. It is that pause which so often takes place in the life of a youth, when the world shows afar off like a vast plain with many paths, all bright and sunny, and losing themselves in the distance, where it is fancied there is something brighter still. At this season we may paint the family of John Shakspere at their evening fireside. The mother is plying her distaff, or hearing Richard his lesson out of the A B C book. The father and the elder son are each intent upon a book of chronicles, manly reading. Gilbert is teaching his sister Joan *Gamut* "the ground of all accord." A neighbour comes in upon business with the father, who quits the room; and then all the group crowd round their elder brother, who has laid aside his chronicle, to entreat him for a story; the mother even joins in the children's prayer to their gentle brother. Has not he himself

pictured such a home scene? May we not read for Hermione, Mary Shakspere, and for Mamillius, William?

"*Her.* What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come, sir, now
I am for you again: Pray you, sit by us,
And tell 's a tale.
Mam. Merry, or sad, shall 't be?
Her. As merry as you will.
Mam. A sad tale 's best for winter:
I have one of sprites and goblins.
Her. Let 's have that, good sir.
Come on, sit down:—Come on, and do your best
To fright me with your sprites: you 're powerful at it.
Mam. There was a man,—
Her. Nay, come, sit down; then on.
Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard.—I will tell it softly;
Yon crickets shall not hear it.
Her. Come on then,
And give 't me in mine ear."*

And truly that boy must have had access to a prodigious mine of such stories, whether "merry or sad." What a storehouse was "The Palace of Pleasure, beautified, adorned, and well furnished with pleasaunt histories and excellent nouelles, selected out of diuers good and commendable authors; by William Painter, Clarke of the Ordinaunce and Armarie." In this book, according to the dedication of the translator to Ambrose Earl of Warwick, was set forth "the great valiance of noble gentlemen, the terrible combats of courageous personages, the virtuous minds of noble dames, the chaste hearts of constant ladies, the wonderful patience of puissant princes, the mild sufferance of well-disposed gentlewomen, and, in divers, the quiet bearing of adverse fortune." Pleasant little apophthegms and short fables were there in that book. There was Æsop's fable of the old lark and her young ones, wherein "he prettily and aptly doth premonish that hope and confidence of things attempted by man ought to be fixed and trusted in none other but in himself." There was the story, most delightful to a child, of the bondman at Rome, who was brought into the open place upon which a great multitude looked, to fight with a lion of marvellous bigness; and the fierce lion when he saw him "suddenly stood still, and afterwards by little and little, in gentle sort, he came unto the man as though he had known him," and licked his hands and legs; and the bondman told that he had healed in former time the wounded foot of the lion, and the beast became his friend. In the same storehouse was a tale which Painter translated from the French of Pierre Boisteau—a true tale, as he records it, "the memory whereof to this day is so well known at Verona, as unneths† their blubbered eyes be yet dry that saw and beheld that lamentable sight." It was "The goodly history of the true and constant love between Romeo and Julietta;" and there was described how Romeo came into the hall of the Capulets whose family were at variance with his own, the Montesches, and, "very shamefaced, withdrew himself into a corner;—but by reason of the light of the torches, which burned very bright, he was by and by known and looked upon by the whole company;" how he held the frozen hand of Juliet, the daughter of the Capulet, and it warmed and thrilled, so that from that moment there was love between them; how the lady was told that Romeo was the "son of her father's capital enemy and deadly foe;" how, in the little street before her father's house, Juliet saw Romeo walking, "through the brightness of the moon;" how they were joined in holy marriage secretly by the good Friar Lawrence; and then came bloodshed, and grief, and the banishment of Romeo, and the friar gave

* "Winter's Tale," Act II., Scene I. † *Unneths*, scarcely.

the lady a drug to produce a pleasant sleep, which was like unto death; and she, "so humble, wise, and debonnaire," was laid "in the ordinary grave of the Capulets," as one dead, and Romeo, having bought poison of an apothecary, went to the tomb, and there laid down and died; and the sleeping wife awoke, and with the aid of the dagger of Romeo she died beside him. From the same collection of tales would he learn the story of "Giletta of Narbonne," who cured the King of France of a painful malady, and the King gave her in marriage to the Count Beltramo, with whom she had been brought up, and her husband despised and forsook her, but at last they were united, and lived in great honour and felicity. There was another collection,—the "Gesta Romanorum," translated by R. Robinson in 1577,—old legends, come down to those latter days from monkish historians, who had embodied in their narratives all the wild traditions of the ancient and modern world. Such was the story of the rich heiress who chose a husband by the machinery of a gold, a silver, and a leaden casket;—and another story of the merchant whose inexorable creditor required the fulfilment of his bond in cutting a pound of flesh nearest the merchant's heart, and by the skilful interpretation of the bond the cruel creditor was defeated. There was the story, too, in these legends, of the Emperor Theodosius, who had three daughters; and those two daughters who said they loved him more than themselves were unkind to him, but the youngest, who only said she loved him as much as he was worthy, succoured him in his need, and was his true daughter. There was in that collection also a feeble outline of the history of a king whose wife died upon the stormy sea, and her body was thrown overboard, and the child she then bore was lost, and found by the father after many years, and the mother was also wonderfully kept in life. Stories such as these, preserved amidst the wreck of time, were to that youth like the seeds that are found in the tombs of ruined cities, lying with the bones of forgotten generations, but which the genial influences of nature will call into life, and they shall become flowers, and trees, and food for man.

But, beyond all these, our Mamillius had many a tale "of sprites and goblins." He told them, we may well believe at that period, with an assenting faith, if not a prostrate reason. They were not then, in his philosophy, altogether "the very coinage of the brain." Such appearances were above nature, but the commonest movements of the natural world had them in subjection:—

> "I have heard,
> The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
> Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
> Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
> Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
> The extravagant and erring spirit hies
> To his confine."*

Powerful they were, but yet powerless. They came for benevolent purposes: to warn the guilty; to discover the guilt. The belief in them was not a debasing thing. It was associated with the enduring confidence that rested upon a world beyond this material world. Love hoped for such visitations; it had its dreams of such—where the loved one looked smilingly, and spoke of regions where change and separation were not. They might be talked of, even amongst children then, without terror. They lived in that corner of the soul which had trust in angel protections; which believed in celestial hierarchies; which listened to hear the stars moving in harmonious music—

> "Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins,"—

* "Hamlet."

but listened in vain, for,

"Whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it." *

There was another most valued book, which told how,

"In olde dayis of the king Artour,
Of which that Bretons speken gret honour,
All was this lond full filled of faerie;
The elf-queene, with her jolly compagnie,
Danced full oft in many a grene mede." †

Here was the ground-work of beautiful visions of a pleasant race of supernatural beings; who lived by day in the acorn-cups of Arden, and by moonlight held their revels on the green sward of Avon-side, the ringlets of their dance being duly seen;

"Whereof the ewe not bites;"

who tasted the honey-bag of the bee, and held council by the light of the glow-worm; who kept the cankers from the rosebuds, and silenced the hootings of the owl. But from Chaucer the youth must have acquired many high things—the highest things in poetry—besides his glimpses of the fairies. We believe that Shakspere was the pupil of Chaucer; we imagine that the fine bright folio of 1542, whose bold black letter seems the proper dress for the rich antique thought, was his closet companion. The boy would delight in his romance; the poet would, in a few years, learn from him what stores lay hidden of old traditions and fables,—legends that had travelled from one nation to another, gathering new circumstances as they became clothed in a new language, the property of every people, related in the peasant's cabin, studied in the scholar's cell; and Chaucer would teach him that these were the best materials for a poet to work upon, for their universality proved that they were akin to man's inmost nature and feelings. The time would arrive when, in his solitary walks, unbidden tears would come into his eyes as he recollected some passage of matchless pathos; or irrepressible laughter arise at those touches of genial humour which glance like sunbeams over the page. Finally, the matured judgment would learn from Chaucer the possibility of delineating individual character with the minutest accuracy, without separating the individual from the permanent and the universal; and Chaucer would show how a high morality might still consist with freedom of thought and even laxity of expression, and how all that is holy and beautiful might be loved without such scorn or hatred of the impure and the evil as would exclude them from human sympathy. An early familiarity with such a poet as Chaucer must have been a loadstar to one like Shakspere, who was launching into the great ocean of thought without a chart.

But as yet "the realms of gold" were dimly seen. At that hearth, in Henley Street, if the youth began to speak of witches, there would be fear and silence. For did not Mary Shakspere recollect that in the year she was married Bishop Jewel had told the Queen that her subjects pined away, even unto the death, and that their affliction was owing to the increase of witches and sorcerers? Was it not known how there were three sorts of witches,—those that can hurt and not help, those that can help and not hurt, and those that can both help and hurt?‡ It was unsafe even to talk of them. But the youth would have met with the history of the murder of Duncan, King of Scotland, in a chronicler older than Holinshed; and he might tell softly, so that "yon crickets shall not hear it,"—that as Macbeth and

* "Merchant of Venice." † Chaucer: "Wife of Bath's Tale."
‡ See Scot's "Discovery of Witchcraft," 1584.

Banquo journeyed from Forres, sporting by the way together, when the warriors came in the midst of a laund, three wierd sisters suddenly appeared to them, in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of an elder world, and prophesied that Macbeth should be king of Scotland; and Macbeth from that hour desired to be King, and so killed the good King his liege lord. And then the story-teller and his listeners might pass on to safer matters—to the calculations of learned men who could read the fates of mankind in the aspects of the stars; and of those more deeply learned, clothed in garments of white linen, who had command over the spirits of the earth, of the water, and of the air. Some of the children might aver that a horse-shoe over the door, and vervain and dill, would preserve them, as they had been told, from the devices of sorcery. But their mother would call to their mind that there was security far more to be relied on than charms of herb or horse-shoe—that there was a Power that would preserve them from all evil, seen or unseen, if such were His gracious will, and if they humbly sought Him, and offered up their hearts to Him, in all love and trust. And to that Power this household would address themselves; and the night would be without fear, and their sleep pleasant.

[The Fireside.]

BOOK II

[Stratford Church, and Mill. From an original drawing at the beginning of the last century.]

CHAPTER I.

A CALLING.

We have endeavoured to fill up, with some imperfect forms and feeble colours, the very meagre outline which exists of the schoolboy life of William Shakspere. He is now, we will assume, of the age of fourteen—the year 1578; a year which has been held to furnish decisive evidence as to the worldly condition of his father and his family. The first who attempted to write "Some Account of the Life of William Shakspeare," Rowe, says, "His father, who was a considerable dealer in wool, had so large a family, ten children in all, that, though he was his eldest son, he could give him no better education than his own employment. He had bred him, it is true, for some time at a free-school, where, it is probable, he acquired what Latin he was master of: but the narrowness of his circumstances, and the want of his assistance at home, forced his father to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further proficiency in that language." This statement, be it remembered, was written one hundred and thirty years after the event which it professes to record—the early removal of William Shakspere from the free-school to which he had been sent by his father. It is manifestly based upon two assumptions, both of which are incorrect:—The first, that his father had a large family of ten children, and was so narrowed in his circumstances that he could not spare even the *time* of his eldest son, he being taught for nothing; and, secondly, that the son, by his early removal from the school where he acquired "what Latin he was master of," was prevented

attaining a "proficiency in that language," his works manifesting "an ignorance of the ancients." Mr. Halliwell, commenting upon this statement, says, "John Shakspeare's circumstances began to fail him when William was about fourteen, and he then withdrew him from the grammar-school, for the purpose of obtaining his assistance in his agricultural pursuits." Was fourteen an unusually early age for a boy to be removed from a grammar-school? We think not, at a period when there were boy-bachelors at the Universities. If he had been taken from the school three years before, when he was eleven,—certainly an early age,—we should have seen his father then recorded, in 1575, as the purchaser of two freehold houses in Henley Street, and the "narrowness of his circumstances" as the reason of Shakspere's "no better proficiency," would have been at once exploded. In his material allegation Rowe utterly fails.

The family of John Shakspere did not consist, as we have already shown, of ten children. In the year 1578, when the school education of William may be reasonably supposed to have terminated, and before which period his "assistance at home" would rather have been embarrassing than useful to his father, the family consisted of five children: William, aged fourteen; Gilbert, twelve; Joan, nine; Anne, seven; and Richard four. Anne died early in the following year; and, in 1580, Edmund, the youngest child, was born; so that the family never exceeded five living at the same time. But still the circumstances of John Shakspere, even with five children, might have been straitened. The assertion of Rowe excited the persevering diligence of Malone; and he collected together a series of documents from which he infers, or leaves the reader to infer, that John Shakspere and his family gradually sank from their station of respectability at Stratford into the depths of poverty and ruin. The sixth section of Malone's posthumous "Life" is devoted to a consideration of this subject. It thus commences: "The manufacture of gloves, which was, at this period, a very flourishing one, both at Stratford and Worcester (in which latter city it is still carried on with great success), however generally beneficial, should seem, from whatever cause, to have afforded our poet's father but a scanty maintenance." We have endeavoured to show to what extent, and in what manner, John Shakspere was a glover. However, be his occupation what it may, Malone affirms that "when our author was about fourteen years old" the "distressed situation" of his father was evident: it rests "upon surer grounds than conjecture." The corporation books have shown that on particular occasions, such as the visitation of the plague in 1564, John Shakspere contributed like others to the relief of the poor; but now, in January, 1577-8, he is taxed for the necessities of the borough only to pay half what other aldermen pay; and in November of the same year, whilst other aldermen are assessed fourpence weekly towards the relief of the poor, John Shakspere "shall not be taxed to pay anything." In 1579 the sum levied upon him for providing soldiers at the charge of the borough is returned, amongst similar sums of other persons, as "unpaid and unaccounted for." There are other corroborative proofs of John Shakspere's poverty at this period brought forward by Malone. In this precise year, 1578, he mortgages his wife's inheritance of Asbies to Edmund Lambert for forty pounds; and, in the same year, the will of Mr. Roger Sadler of Stratford, to which is subjoined a list of debts due to him, shows that John Shakspere was indebted to him five pounds; for which sum Edmund Lambert was a security,—"By which," says Malone, "it appears that John Shakspeare was then considered insolvent, if not as one depending rather on the credit of others than his own." It is of little consequence to the present age to know whether an alderman of Stratford, nearly three hundred years past, became unequal to maintain his social position; but to enable us to form a right estimate of the education of William Shakspere, and of the circumstances in which he was placed at the most influential period of his life,

it may not be unprofitable to consider how far these revelations of the private affairs of his father support the case which Malone holds he has so triumphantly proved. At the time in question, the best evidence is unfortunately destroyed; for the registry of the Court of Record at Stratford is wanting, from 1569 to 1585. Nothing has been added to what Malone has collected as to this precise period. It amounts therefore to this,—that in 1578 he mortgages an estate for forty pounds; that he is indebted also five pounds to a friend for which his mortgagee had become security; and that he is excused one public assessment, and has not contributed to another. At this time he is the possessor of two freehold houses in Henley Street, bought in 1574. Malone, a lawyer by profession, supposes that the money for which Asbies was mortgaged went to pay the purchase of the Stratford freeholds; according to which theory, these freeholds had been unpaid for during four years, and the "good and lawful money" was not "in hand" when the vendor parted with the premises. We hold, and we think more reasonably, that in 1578, when he mortgaged Asbies, John Shakspere became the purchaser, or at any rate the occupier, of lands in the parish of Stratford, but not in the borough; and that, in either case, the money for which Asbies was mortgaged was the capital employed in this undertaking. The lands which were purchased by William Shakspere of the Combe family, in 1601, are described in the deed as "lying or being within the parish, fields, or town of Old Stretford." But the will of William Shakspere, he having become the heir-at-law of his father, devises all his lands and tenements "within the towns, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe." Old Stratford is a local denomination, essentially different from Bishopton or Welcombe; and, therefore, whilst the lands purchased by the son in 1601 might be those recited in the will as lying in Old Stratford, he might have derived from his father the lands of Bishopton and Welcombe, of the purchase of which by himself we have no record. But we have a distinct record that William Shakspere did derive lands from his father, in the same way that he inherited the two freeholds in Henley Street. Mr. Halliwell prints, without any inference, a "Deed of Settlement of Shakespeare's Property, 1639;" that deed contains a remarkable recital, which appears conclusive as to the position of the father as a landed proprietor. The fine for the purpose of settlement is taken upon; 1, a tenement in Blackfriars; 2, a tenement at Acton; 3, the capital messuage of New Place; 4, the tenement in Henley Street; 5, one hundred and twenty-seven acres of land purchased of Combe; and 6, "all other the messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments whatsoever, situate lying and being in the towns, hamlets, villages, fields and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or any of them in the said county of Warwick, *which heretofore were the* INHERITANCE *of William Shakspere*, gent., deceased." The word inheritance could only be used in one legal sense; *they came to him by descent*, as heir-at-law of his father. It would be difficult to find a more distinct confirmation of the memorandum upon the grant of arms in the Heralds' College to John Shakspere, "he hath lands and tenements, of good wealth and substance, 500*l*." The lands of Bishopton and Welcombe are in the parish of Stratford, but not in the borough. Bishopton was a hamlet, having an ancient chapel of ease. We hold, then, that in the year 1578 John Shakspere, having become more completely an agriculturist—a *yeoman* as he is described in a deed of 1579—ceased, for the purposes of business, to be an occupier within the borough of Stratford. Other aldermen are rated to pay towards the furniture of pikemen, billmen, and archers, six shillings and eight-pence; whilst John Shakspere is to pay three shillings and four-pence. Why less than other aldermen? The next entry but one, which relates to a brother alderman, suggests an answer to the question:—"Robert Bratt, *nothing* IN THIS PLACE." Again, ten months after,—"It is ordained

that every alderman shall pay weekly, towards the relief of the poor, four-pence, save John Shakspere and *Robert Bratt*, who shall not be taxed to pay any thing." Here John Shakspere is associated with Robert Bratt, who, according to the previous entry, was to pay nothing in this place; that is, in the *borough* of Stratford, to which the orders of the council alone apply. The return, in 1579, of Mr. Shakspere as leaving unpaid the sum of three shillings and three-pence, was the return upon a levy for the *borough*, in which, although the possessor of property, he might have ceased to reside, or have only partially resided, paying his assessments in the *parish*. The Borough of Stratford, and the Parish of Stratford, are essentially different things, as regards entries of the Corporation and of the Court of Record. The Report from Commissioners of Municipal Corporations says, "The limits of the borough extend over a space of about half a mile in breadth, and rather more in length * * *. The mayor, recorder, and senior aldermen of the borough have also jurisdiction, as justices of the peace, over a small town or suburb adjoining the Church of Stratford-upon-Avon, called Old Stratford, and over the precincts of the church itself." We shall have occasion to revert to this distinction between the borough and the parish, at a more advanced period in the life of Shakspere's father, when his utter ruin has been somewhat rashly inferred from certain obscure registers.

Seeing, then, that at any rate, in the year 1574, when John Shakspere purchased two freehold houses in Stratford, it was scarcely necessary for him to withdraw his son William from school, as Rowe has it, on account of the narrowness of his circumstances (the education of that school costing the father nothing), it is not difficult to believe that the son remained there till the period when boys were usually withdrawn from grammar-schools. In those days the education of the university commenced much earlier than at present. Boys intended for the learned professions, and more especially for the church, commonly went to Oxford and Cambridge at eleven or twelve years of age. If they were not intended for those professions, they probably remained at the grammar-school till they were thirteen or fourteen; and then they were fitted for being apprenticed to tradesmen, or articled to attorneys, a numerous and thriving body in those days of cheap litigation. Many also went early to the Inns of Court, which were the universities of the law, and where there was real study and discipline in direct connection with the several Societies. To assume that William Shakspere did not stay long enough at the grammar-school of Stratford to obtain a very fair "proficiency in Latin," with some knowledge of Greek, is to assume an absurdity upon the face of the circumstances; and it could never have been assumed at all, had not Rowe, setting out upon a false theory, that, because in the works of Shakspere "we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients," held that *therefore* "his not copying at least something from them may be an argument of his never having read them." Opposed to this is the statement of Aubrey, much nearer to the times of Shakspere: "he understood Latin pretty well." Rowe had been led into his illogical inference by the "small Latin and less Greek" of Jonson; the "old mother-wit" of Denham; the "his learning was very little" of Fuller; the "native wood-notes wild" of Milton,—phrases, every one of which is to be taken with considerable qualification, whether we regard the peculiar characters of the utterers, or the circumstances connected with the words themselves. The question rests not upon the interpretation of the dictum of this authority or that; but upon the indisputable fact that the very earliest writings of Shakspere are imbued with a spirit of classical antiquity; and that the allusive nature of the learning that manifests itself in them, whilst it offers the best proof of his familiarity with the ancient writers, is a circumstance which has misled those who never attempted to dispute the existence of the learning which was displayed in the direct pedantry of his contemporaries. "*If*," said Hales of

Eton, "he had not *read* the classics, he had likewise not *stolen* from them." Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and all the early dramatists, overload their plays with quotation and mythological allusion. According to Hales, they steal, and therefore they have read. He who uses his knowledge skilfully is assumed not to have read.

It is scarcely necessary to entertain any strong opinions as to the worldly calling of William Shakspere, between the period of his leaving the grammar-school and his occupation as a dramatic poet and actor. The internal evidence of his writings would appear to show the most intimate acquaintance with the ordinary life of a cultivator; and his own pursuits, in his occasional or complete retirement at Stratford, exhibit the same tastes. But Malone has a confident belief that upon Shakspere leaving school he was placed for two or three years in the office of one of the seven attorneys who practised in the Court of Record in Stratford. Mr. Wheler, of Stratford, having taken up the opinion many years ago, upon the suggestion of Malone, that Shakspere might have been in an attorney's office, availed himself of his opportunities as a solicitor to examine hundreds of documents of Shakspere's time, in the hope of discovering his signature. No such signature was found. Malone adds, "The comprehensive mind of our poet, it must be owned, embraced almost every object of nature, every trade, and every art, the manners of every description of men, and the general language of almost every profession: but his knowledge and application of legal terms seem to me not merely such as might have been acquired by the casual observation of his all-comprehending mind; it has the appearance of technical skill; and he is so fond of displaying it on all occasions, that there is, I think, some ground for supposing that he was early initiated in at least the forms of the law." * Malone then cites a number of passages exemplifying Shakspere's knowledge and application of legal terms. The theory was originally propounded by Malone in his edition of 1790; and it gave rise to many subsequent notes of the commentators, pointing out these technical allusions. The frequency of their occurrence, and the accuracy of their use, are, however, no proof to us that Shakspere was professionally a lawyer. There is every reason to believe that the principles of law, especially of the law of real property, were much more generally understood in those days than in our own. Educated men, chiefly those who possessed property, looked upon law as a science instead of a mystery; and its terms were used in familiar speech instead of being regarded as a technical jargon. When Hamlet says, "This fellow might be in his time a great *buyer of land*, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries," he employs terms with which every gentleman was familiar, because the owner of property was often engaged in a practical acquaintance with them. This is one of the examples given by Malone. "No writer," again says Malone, "but one who had been conversant with the technical language of leases and other conveyances, would have used *determination* as synonymous to *end*." He refers to a passage in the 13th Sonnet,—

> "So should that beauty which you hold in lease
> Find no *determination*."

We may add that Coriolanus uses the verb in the same way:—

> "Shall I be charg'd no further than this present?
> Must all *determine* here?"

The word is used as a term of law, with a full knowledge of its primary meaning; and so Shakspere uses it. The chroniclers use it in the same way. Upon the passage

* Posthumous "Life."

in the Sonnets to which we have just referred, Malone has a note, with a parallel passage from Daniel:—

"In *beauty's lease* expir'd appears
The date of age, the calends of our death."

Daniel was not a lawyer, but a scholar and a courtier. Upon the passage in Richard III.,—

"Tell me, what state, what dignity, what honour,
Canst thou *demise* to any child of mine?"—

Malone asks what poet but Shakspere has used the word *demise* in this sense; observing that "hath demised, granted, and to farm let" is the constant language of leases. Being the constant language, a man of the world would be familiar with it. A quotation from a theologian may show this familiarity as well as one from a poet:—"I conceive it ridiculous to make the condition of an *indenture* something that is necessarily annexed to the possession of the *demise*." If Warburton had used law-terms in this logical manner, we might have recollected his early career; but we do not learn that Hammond, the great divine from whom we quote, had any other than a theological education. We are further told, when Shallow says to Davy, in Henry IV., "Are those *precepts* served?" that *precepts*, in this sense, is a word only known in the office of a justice of peace. Very different would it have been indeed from Shakspere's usual precision, had he put any word in the mouth of a justice of peace that was not known in his office. When the Boatswain, in "The Tempest," roars out "Take in the topsail," he uses a phrase that is known only on shipboard. In the passage of "Henry IV.," Part II.,—

"For what in me was *purchas'd*,
Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort,"—

it is held that *purchase*, being used in its strict legal sense, could be known only to a lawyer. An educated man could scarcely avoid knowing the great distinction of *purchase* as opposed to *descent*, the only two modes of acquiring real estate. This general knowledge, which it would be very remarkable if Shakspere had not acquired, involves the use of the familiar law-terms of his day, *fee simple*, *fine* and *recovery*, *entail*, *remainder*, *escheat*, *mortgage*. The commonest *practice* of the law, such as a sharp boy would have learnt in two or three casual attendances upon the Bailiff's Court at Stratford, would have familiarized Shakspere very early with the words which are held to imply considerable technical knowledge—*action*, *bond*, *warrant*, *bill*, *suit*, *plea*, *arrest*. It must not be forgotten that the terms of law, however they may be technically applied, belong to the habitual commerce of mankind; they are no abstract terms, but essentially deal with human acts, and interests, and thoughts: and it is thus that, without any fanciful analogies, they more readily express the feelings of those who use them with a general significancy, than any other words that the poet could apply. A writer who has carried the theory of Shakspere's professional occupation farther even than Malone, holds that the Poems are especially full of these technical terms; and he gives many instances from the "Venus and Adonis," the "Lucrece," and the "Sonnets," saying, "they swarm in his poems even to deformity." * Surely, when we read those exquisite lines,—

"When to the *sessions* of sweet silent thought
I *summon* up remembrance of things past,"—

we think of anything else than the judge and the crier of the court; and yet this is one of the examples produced in proof of this theory. Dryden's noble use of

* Brown's "Autobiographical Poems," &c.

"the last *assizes*" is no evidence that he was a lawyer.* Many similar instances are given, equally founded, we think, upon the mistake of believing that the technical language has no relation to the general language. Metaphorical, no doubt, are some of these expressions, such as

> "But be contented when that fell *arrest*
> Without all *bail* shall carry me away;"

but the metaphors are as familiar to the reader as to the poet himself. They present a clear and forcible image to the mind; and looking at the habits of society, they can scarcely be called technical. Dekker describes the conversation at a third-rate London ordinary:—"There is another ordinary, at which your London usurer, your stale bachelor, and your thrifty attorney do resort; the price threepence; the rooms as full of company as a jail; and indeed divided into several wards, like the beds of an hospital The compliment between these is not much, their words few; for the belly hath no ears: every man's eye here is upon the other man's trencher, to note whether his fellow lurch him, or no: if they chance to discourse, it is of nothing but of statutes, bonds, recognizances, fines, recoveries, audits, rents, subsidies, sureties, enclosures, liveries, indictments, outlawries, feoffments, judgments, commissions, bankrupts, amercements, and of such horrible matter."† Here is pretty good evidence of the general acquaintance with the law's jargon; and Dekker, who was himself a dramatic poet, has put together in a few lines as many technical terms as we may find in Shakspere.

* "Ode on Mrs. Killigrew." † Dekker's "Gull's Hornbook:" 1609.

[The Bailiff's Play.]

CHAPTER II.

THE PLAYERS AT STRATFORD.

THE ancient accounts of the Chamberlains of the Borough of Stratford exhibit a number of payments made out of the funds of the corporation for theatrical performances. In 1569, when John Shakspere was chief magistrate, there is a payment of nine shillings to the Queen's players, and of twelvepence to the Earl of Worcester's players. In 1573 the Earl of Leicester's players received five shillings and eightpence. In 1576 "my Lord of Warwick's players" have a gratuity of seventeen shillings, and the Earl of Worcester's players of five and eightpence. In 1577 "my Lord of Leicester's players" received fifteen shillings, and "my Lord of Worcester's players" three and fourpence. In 1579 and 1580 the entries are more circumstantial:—

"1579. Item paid to my Lord Straunge men the xith day of February at the comaundement of Mr. Bayliffe, *vs.*

P^{d} at the comaundement of Mr. Baliffe to the Countys of Essex plears, xiiii*s.* vi*d.*

1580. P^{d} to the Earle of Darbyes players at the comaundement of Mr. Baliffe, viii*s.* iv*d.*"

It thus appears that there had been three sets of players at Stratford within a short distance of the time when William Shakspere was sixteen years of age. In a subsequent volume we have endeavoured to present a general view of the state of the stage at this point of its history; with reference to the impressions which theatrical performances would then make upon him who would be the chief instrument in building up upon these rude foundations a noble and truly poetical drama. Such a view may enable the reader to form a tolerable conception of the amusements which were so highly popular, and so amply encouraged, in a small town far distant from the capital, as to invite three distinct sets of players there to exhibit in the brief period which is defined in the entries of 1579 and 1580.*

The hall of the Guild, which afterwards became the Town Hall, was the occasional theatre of Stratford. It is now a long room, and somewhat low, the building being divided into two floors, the upper of which is used as the Grammar School. The elevation for the Court at one end of the hall would form the stage; and on one side is an ancient separate chamber to which the performers would retire. With a due provision of benches, about three hundred persons could be accommodated in this room; and no doubt Mr. Bailiff would be liberal in the issue of his invitations, so that Stratford might not grudge its expenditure.

If there was amongst that audience at Stratford, in 1580, witnessing the performance of such a comedy as "Common Conditions,"† one in whom the poetical feeling was rapidly developing, and whose taste had been formed upon better models than anything which the existing drama could offer to him (such a one perhaps was there in the person of William Shakspere) he would perceive how imperfectly this comedy attained the end of giving delight to a body of persons assembled together with an aptitude for delight. And yet they would have been pleased and satisfied. There is in this comedy bustle and change of scene; something to move the feelings in the separation of lovers and their re-union; laughter excited by grotesqueness which stands in the place of wit and humour; music and song; and, more than all, lofty words and rhymed cadences which sound like poetry. But to that one critical listener the total absence of the real dramatic spirit would be most perplexing. At the moment when he himself would be fancying what the characters upon the scene were about to do,—how their discourse, like that of real life, would have reference to the immediate business of the action in which they were engaged, and explain their own feelings, passions, peculiarities,—the writer would present, through the mouth of some one of these characters, a description of what some one else was doing or had done; and thus, though the poem was a dialogue, it was not a drama; it did not realize the principle of personation which such a mind was singularly formed to understand and cultivate. The structure of the versification, too, would appear to him altogether unfit to represent the thoughts and emotions of human beings engaged in working out a natural train of adventures. Some elevation of style would be required to distinguish the language from that of ordinary life, without being altogether opposed to that language; something that would convey the idea of poetical art, whilst it was sufficiently real not to make the art too visible. "The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex;" printed in 1571, "as the same was showed on the stage before the Queen's Majesty, about nine year past, by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple," would give him the most complete specimen of that species of verse which appeared fitted for the purposes of the higher drama. The speeches were indeed long, after the model of the stately harangues which he had read in his "Livy" and "Sallust;" but they were forcible and impressive; especially those lines on

* See "Studies of Shakspere," Book I., Chapters II, III, IV, and V.
† "Studies," p. 11.

the causes and miseries of civil war of which our history had furnished such fearful examples:—

"And thou, O Britain! whilom in renown,
Whilom in wealth and fame, shalt thus be torn,
Dismember'd thus, and thus be rent in twain,
Thus wasted and defac'd, spoil'd and destroy'd:
These be the fruits your civil wars will bring.
Hereto it comes, when kings will not consent
To grave advice, but follow wilful will.
This is the end, when in fond princes' hearts
Flattery prevails, and sage rede hath no place.
These are the plagues, when murder is the mean
To make new heirs unto the royal crown.
Thus wreak the gods, when that the mother's wrath
Nought but the blood of her own child may 'suage.
These mischiefs spring when rebels will arise,
To work revenge, and judge their prince's fact.
This, this ensues, when noble men do fail
In loyal truth, and subjects will be kings.
And this doth grow, when, lo! unto the prince,
Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
No certain heir remains; such certain heir
As not all only is the rightful heir,
But to the realm is so made known to be,
And truth thereby vested in subjects' hearts."

Yet the entire play of "Ferrex and Porrex" was monotonous and uninteresting; it seemed as if the dramatic form oppressed the undoubted genius of one of the authors of that play. How inferior were the finest lines which Sackville wrote in this play, correct and perspicuous as they were, compared with some of the noble bursts in the Induction to "A Mirror for Magistrates!" Surely the author of the sublime impersonation of War could have written a tragedy that would have filled the heart with terror, if not with pity!—

"Lastly stood War in glittering arms yclad,
With visage grim, stern looks, and blackly hued:
In his right hand, a naked sword he had
That to the hilts was all with blood imbrued;
And in his left (that kings and kingdoms rued)
Famine and Fire he held, and therewithal
He razed towns, and threw down towers and all."

Still, he might wonder that the example which Sackville had given of dramatic blank verse had not been followed by the writers of plays for the common theatres. A change, however, was taking place; for the First Part of "Promos and Cassandra" was wholly in rhyme; while in the Second Part Master George Whetstone had freely introduced blank verse. In the little book which Stephen Gosson had just written against plays,—his second book in answer to Thomas Lodge,—was an evidence that the multitude most delighted in rhyme: "The poets send their verses to the stage, upon such feet as continually are rolled up in rhyme at the fingers' ends, which is plausible to the barbarous and carrieth a sting into the ears of the common people."* And yet, from another passage of the same writer, the embryo poet might collect that even the refined and learned were delighted with the poetical structure of the common dramas: "So subtle is the devil, that under the colour of recreation in London, and of exercise of learning in the universities, by seeing of plays, he maketh us to join with the Gentiles in their corruption. Because the sweet numbers of poetry, flowing in verse, do wonderfully tickle the hearers' ears, the devil

* "Plays Confuted, in Five Actions."

hath tied this to most of our plays, that whatsoever he would have stick fast to our souls might slip down in sugar by this inticement, for that which delighteth never troubleth our swallow. Thus, when any matter of love is interlarded, though the thing itself be able to allure us, yet it is so set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, amphibologies, similitude; with phrases so picked, so pure, so proper; with action so smooth, so lively, so wanton; that the poison, creeping on secretly without grief, chokes us at last, and hurleth us down in a dead sleep." It is difficult to arrive at an exact knowledge of the truth from the description of one who wrote under such strong excitement as Master Stephen Gosson.

It was about the period which we are now touching upon that Sidney wrote his "Defence of Poesy." The drama was then as he has described it, "much used in England, and none can be more pitifully abused; which, like an unmannerly daughter showing a bad education, causeth her mother Poesy's honour to be called in question." The early framers of the drama seem scarcely to have considered that she was the daughter of Poesy. A desire for dramatic exhibitions—not a new desire, but taking a new direction—had forcibly seized upon the English people. The demand was to be supplied as it best might be, by the players who were to profit by it. They were, as they always will be, the best judges of what would merely please an audience; and it was to be expected that, having within themselves the power of constructing the rude plot of any popular story, so as to present rapid movement, and what in the language of the stage is called business, the beauty or even propriety of the dialogue would be a secondary consideration, and indeed would be pretty much left to the extemporal invention of the actor. That the wit of the clown was almost entirely of this nature we have the most distinct evidence. Sidney, with all his fine taste, was a stickler for "place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. For," he says, "where the stage should always represent one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined." As the players were the rude builders of our early drama, and as that drama was founded upon the ruder Mysteries and Moral Plays, in which all propriety was disregarded, so that the senses could be gratified, they naturally rejected the unities of time and place, the observance of which would have deprived their plays of their chief attraction—rapid change and abundant incident. And fortunate was it that they did so; for they thus went on strengthening and widening the foundations of our national drama, the truth and freedom of which could not exist under a law which, literally construed, is not the law of nature; but which, in its treatment by a great artist like Shakspere, would evolve a higher law than "Aristotle's precept and common reason." Had Sidney lived five or six years longer, had he seen or read "Romeo and Juliet," or "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," he would probably have ceased to regard the drama as the unmannerly daughter of Poesy; he would in all likelihood have thought that something was gained even through the "defectuous circumstances" that spurn the bounds of time and place, and compel the imagination to be still or to travel at its bidding, to be utterly regardless of the halt or the march of events, so that one dominant idea possess the soul and sway all its faculties. But this was only to be effected when a play was to become a high work of art; when all the conditions of its excellence should be fully comprehended; when it should unite the two main conditions of the highest excellence—that of subjecting the popular mind to its power, through the skill which only the most refined understanding can altogether appreciate. When the young man of Stratford, who, as we have conceived, knew the drama of his time through the representations of itinerant players, heard the

rude dialogue of such an historic play as "The Famous Victories,"* not altogether without delight, and laughed most heartily at the extemporal pleasantness of the witty clown, a vivid though an imperfect notion of the excellence that might be attained by working up such common materials upon a principle of art must have been developed in his mind. If Sidney's noble defence of his beloved Poesy had then been published, he would, we think, have found in it a reflection of his own opinions as to the "bad education" of the drama. "All their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion: so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained." The objection here is scarcely so much to the mingling kings and clowns, when "the matter so carrieth," as to the thrusting in "the clown by head and shoulders." Upon a right principle of art the familiar and the heroic might be advantageously blended. In this play of "The Famous Victories," the Prince was not only prosaic, but altogether brutalized, so that the transition from the ruffian to the hero was distasteful and unnatural. But surround the same Prince with companions whose profligacy was in some sort balanced and counteracted by their intellectual energy, their wit, their genial mirthfulness; make the Prince a gentleman in the midst of his most wanton levity; and the transition to the hero is not merely probable, it is graceful in itself, it satisfies expectation. But the young poet is yet without models, and he will remain so. He has to work out his own theory of art; but that theory must be gradually and experimentally formed. He has the love of country living in his soul as a presiding principle. There are in his country's annals many stories such as this of Henry V. that might be brought upon the stage to raise "heroes from the grave of oblivion," for glorious example to "these degenerate days." But in those annals are also to be found fit subjects for "the high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants to manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affections of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilded roofs are builded."† As the young poet left the Town Hall of Stratford he would forget Tarleton and his tricks; he would think that an English historical play was yet to be written; perhaps, as the ambitious thought crossed his mind to undertake such a task, the noble lines of Sackville would be present to his memory:—

"And sorrowing I to see the summer flowers,
The lively green, the lusty leas forlorn,
The sturdy trees so shatter'd with the showers,
The fields so fade that flourish'd so beforn;
It taught me well all eartly things be born
To die the death, for nought long time may last;
The summer's beauty yields to winter's blast.

Then looking upward to the heaven's leams,
With night's stars thick-powdered everywhere,
Which erst so glisten'd with the golden streams
That cheerful Phœbus spread down from his sphere,
Beholding dark oppressing day so near:
The sudden sight reduced to my mind
The sundry changes that in earth we find.

* "Studies," p. 19.

† Sidney. "Defence of Poesy."

That musing on this worldly wealth in thought,
Which comes and goes more faster than we see
The flickering flame that with the fire is wrought,
My busy mind presented unto me
Such fall of peers as in this realm had be :
That oft I wish'd some would their woes descrive,
To warn the rest whom fortune left alive."

[Thomas Sackville.]

[Guy's Cliff in the 17th Century.]

CHAPTER III.

LIVING IN THE PAST.

THE earliest, and the most permanent, of poetical associations are those which are impressed upon the mind by localities which have a deep historical interest. It would be difficult to find a district possessing more striking remains of a past time than the neighbourhood in which William Shakspere spent his youth. The poetical feeling which the battle-fields, and castles, and monastic ruins of mid England would excite in him, may be reasonably considered to have derived an intensity through the real history of these celebrated spots being vague, and for the most part traditional. The age of local historians had not yet arrived. The monuments of the past were indeed themselves much more fresh and perfect than in the subsequent days, when every tomb inscription was copied, and every mouldering document set forth. But in the year 1580, if William Shakspere desired to know, for example, with some precision, the history which belonged to those noble towers of Warwick upon which he had often gazed with a delight that scarcely required to be based upon knowledge, he would look in vain for

any guide to his inquiries. Some old people might tell him that they remembered their fathers to have spoken of one John Rous, the son of Geffrey Rous of Warwick, who, having diligently studied at Oxford, and obtained a reputation for uncommon learning, rejected all ambitious thoughts, shut himself up with his books in the solitude of Guy's Cliff, and was engaged to the last in writing the Chronicles of his country, and especially the history of his native County and its famous Earls: and there, in the quiet of that pleasant place, performing his daily offices of devotion as a chantry priest in the little chapel, did John Rous live a life of happy industry till 1491. But the world in general derived little advantage from his labours. Another came after him, commissioned by royal authority to search into all the archives of the kingdom, and to rescue from damp and dust all ancient manuscripts, civil and ecclesiastical. The commission of Leland was well performed; but his "Itinerary" was also to be of little use to his own generation. William Shakspere knew not what Leland had written about Warwickshire; how the enthusiastic and half-poetical antiquary had described, in elegant Latinity, the beauties of woodland and river; and had even given the characteristics of such a place as Guy's Cliff in a few happy words, that would still be an accurate description of its natural features, even after the lapse of three centuries. Caves hewn in the living rock, a thick overshadowing wood, sparkling springs, flowery meadows, mossy grottos, the river rolling over the stones with a gentle noise, solitude and the quiet most friendly to the Muses,—these are the enduring features of the place as painted by the fine old topographer.* But his manuscripts were as sealed to the young Shakspere as those of John Rous. Yet if the future Poet sustained some disadvantage by living before the days of antiquarian minuteness, he could still dwell in the past, and people it with the beings of his own imagination. The chroniclers who had as yet attempted to collect and systematize the records of their country did not aim at any very great exactness either of time or place. When they dealt with a remote antiquity they were as fabulous as the poets themselves; and it was easy to see that they most assumed the appearance of exactness when they wrote of times which have left not a single monumental record. Very diffuse were they when they had to talk of the days of Brute. Intimately could they decipher the private history of Albanact and Humber. The fatal passion of Locrine for Elstride was more familiar to them than that of Henry for Rosamond Clifford, or Edward for Elizabeth Woodville. Of the cities and the gates of King Lud they could present a most accurate description. Of King Leir very exact was their narration: how he, the son of Baldud, "was made ruler over the Britons the year of the world 4338; was noble of conditions, and guided his land and subjects in great wealth." Minutely thus does Fabyan, a chronicler whose volume was open to William Shakspere's boyhood, describe how the King, "fallen into impotent age," believed in the professions of his two elder daughters, and divided with them his kingdom, leaving his younger daughter, who really loved him, to be married without dower to the King of France; and then how his unkind daughters and their husbands "bereft him the governance of the land," and he fled to Gallia, "for to be comforted of his daughter Cordeilla, whereof she having knowledge, of natural kindness comforted him." This in some sort was a story of William Shakspere's locality; for, according to the Chronicle, Leir "made the town of Caerleir, now called Leiceter or Leicester;" and after he was "restored again to his lordship he died, and was buried at his town of Caerleir." The local association may have helped to fix the story in that mind, which in its maturity was to perceive its wondrous poetical capabilities. The early legends of the chroniclers

* "Antra in vivo saxo, nemusculum ibidem opacum, fontes liquidæ et gemmei; prata florida, antra muscosa, rivi levis et per saxa discursus; necnon solitudo et quies Musis amicissima,"—Leland's MS. "Itinerary," as quoted by Dugdale.

are not to be despised, even in an age which in many historical things justly requires evidence; for they were compiled in good faith from the histories which had been compiled before them by the monkish writers, who handed down from generation to generation a narrative which hung together with singular consistency. They were compiled, too, by the later chroniclers, with a zealous patriotism. Fabyan, in his "Prologue," exclaims, with a poetical spirit which is more commendable even than the poetical form which he adopts,—

> "Not for any pomp, nor yet for great meed,
> This work have I taken on hand to compile,
> But only because that I would spread
> The famous honour of this fertile isle,
> That hath continued, by many a long while,
> In excellent honour, with many a royal guide,
> Of whom the deeds have sprong to the world wide."

Lines such as these, homely though they are, were as seeds sown upon a goodly soil, when they were read by William Shakspere. His patriotism was almost instinct.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Stratford there are two remarkable monuments of ancient civilization,—the great roads of the Ichnield-way and the Foss-way. Upon these roads, which two centuries and a half ago would present a singular contrast in the strength of their construction to the miry lanes of a later period, would the young Shakspere often walk; and he would naturally regard these ways with reverence as well as curiosity, for his chroniclers would tell him that they were the work of the Britons before the invasion of the Romans. Fabyan would tell him, in express words, that they were the work of the Britons; and Camden and Dugdale were not as yet to tell him otherwise. Robert of Gloucester says—

> "Faire weyes many on ther ben in Englonde;
> But four mest of all ther ben I understonde,
> That thurgh an old knyge were made ere this,
> As men schal in this boke aftir here tell I wis.
> Fram the South into the North takith Erminge-strete.
> Fram the East into the West goeth Ikeneld-strete.
> Fram South-est to North-west, that is sum del grete
> Fram Dover into Chestre goth Watlynge-strete.
> The ferth of thise is most of alle that tilleth fram Tateneys.
> Fram the South-west to North-est into Englondes ende
> Fosse men callith thilke wey that by mony town doth wende.
> Thise foure weyes on this londe kyng Belin the wise
> Made and ordeined hem with gret fraunchise."

His notion therefore of the people of the days of Lud and Cymbeline would be that they were a powerful and a refined people; excelling in many of the arts of life; formidable in courage and military discipline; enjoying free institutions. When the matured dramatist had to touch upon this period, he would paint the Britons boldly refusing the Roman yoke, but yet partakers of the Roman civilization. The English king who defies Augustus says—

> "Thy Cæsar knighted me; my youth I spent
> Much under him; of him I gather'd honour;
> Which he to seek of me again, perforce,
> Behoves me keep at utterance."

This is an intelligent courage, and not the courage of a king of painted savages. In the depths of the remarkable intrenchments which surround the hill of Welcombe, hearing only the noise of the sheep-bell in the uplands, or the evening chime from the distant church-tower, would William Shakspere think much of the mysterious

past. No one could tell him who made these intrenchments, or for what purpose they were made. Certainly they were produced by the hand of man; but were they for defence or for religious ceremonial? Was the lofty mound, itself probably artificial, which looked down upon them, a fort or a temple? Man, who would know everything and explain everything, assuredly knows little, when he cannot demand of the past an answer to such inquiries. But does he know much more of things which are nearer to his own days? Is the annalist to be trusted when he undertakes not only to describe the actions and to repeat the words, but to explain the thoughts and the motives which prompted the deeds that to a certain extent fixed the destiny of an age? There was a truth, however, which was to be found amidst all the mistakes and contradictions of the annalists—the great poetical truth, that the devices of men are insufficient to establish any permanent command over events; that crime would be followed by retribution; that evil passions would become their own tormentors; that injustice could not be successful to the end; that, although dimly seen and unwillingly acknowledged, the great presiding Power of the world could make evil work for good, and advance the general happiness out of the particular misery. This was the mode, we believe, in which that thoughtful youth read the Chronicles of his country, whether brief or elaborate. Looking at them by the strong light of local association, there would be local tradition at hand to enforce that universal belief in the justice of God's providence which is in itself alone one

[Tomb of King John, Worcester.]

of the many proofs of that justice. It is this religious aspect of human affairs which that young man cultivated when he cherished the poetical aspect. His books have taught him to study history through the medium of poetry. "The Mirror for

Magistrates" is a truer book for him than Fabyan's "Chronicle." He can understand the beauty and the power of his beloved Froissart, who described with incomparable clearness the events which he saw with his own eyes. To do this as Froissart has done it, requires a gift of imagination as well as of faithfulness; of that imagination which, grouping and concentrating things apparently discordant, produces the highest faithfulness, because it sees and exhibits *all* the facts. But the prosaic digest of what others had seen and written about, disproportionate in its estimate of the importance of events, dwelling little upon the influences of individual character, picturing everything in the same monotonous light, and of the same height and breadth; this, which was called history, was to him a tedious fable. He stands by the side of the tomb of King John at Worcester. There, with little monumental pomp, lies the faithless King, poisoned, as he has read, by a monk. The poetical aspect of that man's history lies within a narrow compass. He was intriguing, treacherous, bloody, an oppressor of his people, a persecutor of the unprotected. His life is one of contest and misery; he loses his foreign possessions; his own land is invaded. But he stands up against foreign domination, and that a priestly domination. According to the tradition, he falls by private murder, as a consequence, not of his crimes, but of his resistance to external oppression. The prosaic view of this man's history separates the two things, his crimes and their retribution. The poetical view connects them. Arthur is avenged when the poisoned king, hated and unlamented, finds a resting-place from his own passions and their consequences in the earth beneath the paving-stones of the cathedral of Worcester. But there was a tear even for that man's grave, when his last sufferings were shadowed out in the young poet's mind:—

> "Poison'd,—ill fare:—dead, forsook, cast off:
> And none of you will bid the winter come,
> To thrust his icy fingers in my maw;
> Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course
> Through my burn'd bosom; nor entreat the north
> To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips,
> And comfort me with cold."*

When the dramatic power was working, as we have no doubt it was working early in the mind of William Shakspere, he would look at history to see how events might be brought together, not in the exact order of time, but in the more natural order of cause and effect. Events would be made prominent, not according to their absolute political importance, but as they were the result of high passions and fearful contests of opinion. The epic of history is a different thing from the dramatic. In the epic the consequences of an event, perhaps the remote consequences, may be more important than the event itself; may be foreseen before the event comes; may be fully delineated after the event has happened. In the drama the importance of an action must be understood in the action itself; the hero must be great in the instant time, and not in the possible future. It is easy to understand, therefore, how the matured Shakspere attempted not to work upon many of the local associations which must have been vividly present to his youthful fancy. The great events connected with certain localities were not capable of sustaining a dramatic development. There was no event, for example, more important in its consequences than the Battle of Evesham. The battle-field must have been perfectly familiar to the young Shakspere. About two miles and a half from Evesham is an elevated point, near the village of Twyford, where the Alcester road is crossed by another track. The Avon is not more than a mile distant on either hand; for, flowing from Offenham to Evesham, a distance of about three miles, it encircles that town, returning in a

* "King John," Act v., Scene vii.

nearly parallel direction, about the same distance, to Charlbury. The great road, therefore, from Alcester to Evesham continues, after it passes Tywford, through a narrow tongue of land bounded by the Avon, having considerable variety of elevation. Immediately below Twyford is a hollow, now called Battlewell, crossing which the road ascends to the elevated platform of Greenhill. Here, then, was the scene of that celebrated battle which put an end to the terrible conflicts between the Crown and the Nobility, and for a season left the land in peace under the sway of an energetic despotism. The circumstances which preceded that battle, as told in "The Chronicle of Evesham" (which in William Shakspere's time would have been read and remembered by many an old tenant of the Abbey), were singularly interesting. Simon Montfort, the great Earl of Leicester, was waiting at Evesham the arrival of his son's army from Kenilworth; but Prince Edward had surprised that army, and taken many of its leaders prisoners, and young Montfort durst not leave his stronghold. In that age rumour did not fly quite so quickly as in our days. The Earl of Leicester was ignorant of the events that had happened at Kenilworth. He had made forced marches from Hereford to Worcester, and thence to Evesham. There were solemn masses in the Abbey Church on the 3rd of August, 1265, and the mighty Earl, who had won for himself the name of "Sir Simon the Righteous," felt assured that his son was at hand, and that Heaven would uphold his cause against a perjured Prince. On the morning of the 4th of August the Earl of Leicester sent his barber Nicholas to the top of the Abbey tower, to look for the succour that was coming over the hills from Kenilworth. The barber came down with eager gladness, for he saw, a few miles off, the banner of young Simon de Montfort in advance of a mighty host. And again the Earl sent the barber to the top of

[Bridge at Evesham.]

the Abbey tower, and the man hastily descended in fear and sorrow, for the banner of young de Montfort was no more to be seen, but, coming nearer and nearer, were seen the standards of Prince Edward, and of Mortimer, and of Gloucester. Then saw the Earl his imminent peril; and he said, according to one writer, "God have our souls all, our days are all done;" or, according to another writer, "Our souls God have,

for our bodies be theirs." But Montfort was not a man to fly. Over the bridge of Evesham he might have led his forces, so as to escape from the perilous position in which he was shut up. He hastily marched northward, with King Henry his prisoner, at two o'clock in the afternoon of that day. Before nightfall the waters of the little valley were blood-red. Thousands were slain between those two hills; thousands fled, but there was no escape but by the bridge of Evesham, and they perished in the Avon. The old King, turned loose upon a war-horse amidst the terrible conflict, was saved from death at the hands of the victors by crying out, "I am Henry of Winchester." The massacre of Evesham, where a hundred and eighty barons and knights, in arms for what they called their liberties, were butchered without quarter, was a final measure of royal vengeance. It was a great epic story. It had dramatic points, but it was not essentially dramatic. If Shakspere had chosen the wars of the Barons, instead of the wars of the Roses, for a vast dramatic theme, the fate of Simon de Montfort and his gallant company might have been told so as never to have been forgotten. But he had another tale of civil war to tell; one more essentially dramatic in the concentration of its events, the rapid changes in its fortunes, the marked characters of its leaders. On the battle-field of Evesham he would indeed meditate upon "The ill success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissension, and how just God is evermore in punishing murder."* But these lessons were to be worked out more emphatically in other histories. Another Warwickshire poet, Drayton, would sing the great Battle of Edward and Leicester.

There is peace awhile in the land. A strong man is on the throne. The first

[Ancient Statue of Guy at Guy's Cliff.]

Edward dies, and, a weak and profligate son succeeding him, there is again misrule and turbulence. Within ten miles of Stratford there was a fearful tragedy enacted in the year 1312. On the little knoll called Blacklow Hill, about a mile from Warwick, might William Shakspere ponder upon the fate of Gaveston. In that

* Nash.

secluded spot all around him would be peacefulness ; the only sound of life about him would be the dashing of the wheel of the old mill at Guy's Cliff. The towers of Warwick would be seen rising above their surrounding trees ; and, higher than all, Guy's Tower. He would have heard that this tower was not so called from the Saxon champion, the Guy of minstrelsy, whose statue, bearing shield and sword, he had often looked upon in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen at Guy's Cliff. The Tower was called after the Guy whose common name—a name of opprobrium fixed on him by Gaveston—was associated with that of his maternal ancestors,—Guy, the Black Dog of Arden. And then the tragedy of Blacklow Hill, as he recollected this, would present itself to his imagination. There is a prisoner standing in the great hall of Warwick Castle. He is unarmed ; he is clad in holiday vestments, but they are soiled and torn ; his face is pale with fear and the fatigue of a night journey. By force has he been hurried some thirty miles across the country from Dedington, near Banbury ; and amidst the shouts of soldiery and the rude clang of drum and trumpet has he entered the castle of his enemies, where they are sitting upon the dais,—Warwick and Lancaster, and Hereford and Arundel,—and the prisoner stands trembling before them, a monarch's minion, but one whom they have no right to punish. But the sentence is pronounced that he shall die. He sued for mercy to those whom he had called "the black dog" and "the old hog," but they spurned him. A sad procession is marshalled. The castle gates are opened ; the drawbridge is let down. In silence the avengers march to Blacklow Hill, with their prisoner in the midst. He dies by the axe. In a few years his unhappy master falls still more miserably. Here was a story, which in some particulars Shakspere's judgment would have rejected, as unworthy to be dramatized. Another poet would arise, a man of undoubted power, of daring genius, of fiery temperament, who would seize upon the story of Edward II. and his wretched favourite, and produce a drama that should present a striking contrast to the drawling histories of the earlier stage. The subject upon which the "dead Shepherd" had put forth his strength was not to be touched by his greater rival.*

A reign of power succeeds to one of weakness. Edward III. is upon the throne. William Shakspere is familiar with the great events of this reign ; for the "Chronicles" of Froissart, translated by Lord Berners, have more than the charm of the romance-writers ; they present realities in colours more brilliant than those of fiction. The clerk of the chamber to Queen Philippa is overflowing with that genial spirit which was to be a great characteristic of Shakspere himself. Froissart looks upon nothing with indifference. He enters most heartily into the spirit of every scene into which he is thrown. The luxuries of courts unfit him not for a relish of the charms of nature. The fatigues of camps only prepare him for the enjoyment of banquets and dances. He throws himself into the boisterous sports of the field at one moment, and is proud to produce a virelay of his own composition at another. The early violets and white and red roses are sweet to his sense ; and so is a night draught of claret or Rochelle wine. He can meditate and write as he travels alone upon his palfrey, with his portmanteau, having no follower but his faithful greyhound ; he can observe and store up in his memory when he is in the court of David II. of Scotland, or of Gaston de Foix, or in the retinue of the Black Prince. The hero of Froissart is Edward Prince of Wales, the glorious son of a glorious father. William Shakspere was in the presence of local associations connected with

* The notice by Shakspere of Marlowe, in "As You Like It," is one of the few examples we have of any mention by the great poet of his contemporaries. This is a kind notice conveyed in the introduction of a line from Marlowe's "Hero and Leander:"—

"Dead Shepherd ! now I find thy saw of might
Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?"

[St. Mary's Hall: Court Front.]

this prince. Edward was especially Prince of Coventry; it was his own city; and he gave licence to build its walls and gates, and cherished its citizens, and dwelt among them. As the young poet walked in the courts of the old hall of St. Mary's, itself a part of an extensive palace, he would believe that the prince had sojourned there after he had won his spurs at Cressy; and he would picture the boy-hero, as Froissart had described him, left by his confiding father in the midst of danger to struggle alone, and alone to triumph. And then, it may be, the whole epopee of that great war for the conquest of France might be shaped out in the young man's imagination; and amidst its chivalrous daring, its fields of slaughter, its perils overcome by almost superhuman strength, kings and princes for prisoners, and the conqueror lowly and humble in his triumph, would there be touching domestic scenes,—Sir Eustace de Pierre, the rich burgher of Calais, putting his life in jeopardy for the safety of the good town, and the vengeance of the stern conqueror averted by his gentle queen, all arranging themselves into something like a great drama. But even here the dramatic interest was not sustained. There was a succession of stirring events,

but no one great action to which all other actions tended and were subservient. Cressy is fought, Calais is taken, Poictiers is to come, after the hero has marched through the country, burning and wasting, regardless of the people, thinking only of his father's disputed rights ; and then a mercenary war in Spain in a bad cause, and the hero dies in his bed, and the war for conquest is to generate other wars. These are events that belong to the chronicler, and not to the dramatist. Romance has come in to lend them a human interest. The future conqueror of France is to be a weak lover at the feet of a Countess of Salisbury ; to be rejected ; to cast off his weakness. The drama may mix the romance and the chronicle together ; it has done so ; but we believe not that he who had a struggle with his judgment to unite the epic and the dramatic in the history of Henry V. ever attempted to dramatize the story of Edward III.*

* See our Notice of the play entitled "The Reign of Edward III." in "Studies," book vi., c. iv.

[St. Mary's Hall: Interior.]

CHAPTER IV.

YORK AND LANCASTER.

HALL, the chronicler, writing his history of "The Families of Lancaster and York," about seventy years after the "continual dissension for the crown of this noble realm" was terminated, says,—"What nobleman liveth at this day, or what gentleman of any ancient stock or progeny is clear, whose lineage hath not been infested and plagued with this unnatural division?" During the boyhood of William Shakspere, it cannot be doubted that he would meet with many a gentleman, and many a yeoman, who would tell him how their forefathers had been thus "infested and plagued." The traditions of the most stirring events of that contest would at this time be about a century old; generally diluted in their interest by passing through the lips of three or four generations, but occasionally presented vividly to the mind

of the inquiring boy in the narration of some amongst the "hoary-headed eld," whose fathers had fought at Bosworth or Tewksbury. Many of these traditions, too, would be essentially local; extending back even to the period when the banished Duke of Hereford, in his bold march

"From Ravenspurg to Cotswold,"*

gathered a host of followers in the Counties of Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Warwick, and Worcester. Fields, where battles had been fought; towns, where parliaments had assembled, and treaties had been ratified; castles, where the great leaders had stood at bay, or had sallied forth upon the terrified country—such were the objects which the young poet would associate with many an elaborate description of the chroniclers, and many an interesting anecdote of his ancient neighbours. It appears to us that his dramatic power was early directed towards this long and complicated story, by some principle even more exciting than its capabilities for the purposes of the drama. It was the story, we think, which was presented to him in the evening-talk around the hearth of his childhood; it was the story whose written details were most accessible to him, being narrated by Hall with a rare minuteness of picturesque circumstance; but it was a story also of which his own district had been the scene, in many of its most stirring events. Out of ten English Historical Plays which were written by him, and some undoubtedly amongst his first performances, he has devoted eight to circumstances belonging to this memorable story. No other nation ever possessed such a history of the events of a century,—a history in which the agents are not the hard abstractions of warriors and statesmen, but men of flesh and blood like ourselves; men of passion, and crime, and virtue; elevated perhaps by the poetical art, but filled, also through that art, with such a wondrous life that we dwell amongst them as if they were of our own day, and feel that they must have spoken as he has made them speak, and act as he has made them act. It is in vain that we are told that some events are omitted, and some transposed; that documentary history does not exhibit its evidence *here*, that a contemporary narrative somewhat militates against the representation *there*. The general truth of this dramatic history cannot be shaken. It is a philosophical history in the very highest sense of that somewhat abused term. It contains the philosophy that can only be produced by the union of the noblest imagination with the most just and temperate judgment. It is the loftiness of the poetical spirit which has enabled Shakspere alone to write this history with impartiality. Open the chroniclers, and we find the prejudices of the Yorkist or the Lancastrian manifesting the intensity of the old factious hatred. Who can say to which faction Shakspere belongs? He has comprehended the whole, whilst others knew only a part.

After the first two or three pages of Hall's "Chronicle," we are plunged into the midst of a scene, gorgeous in all the pomp of chivalry; a combat for life or death, made the occasion of a display of regal magnificence such as had been seldom presented in England. The old chronicler of the two Houses puts forth all his strength in the description of such scenes. He slightly passes over the original quarrel between Hereford and Norfolk: the pride, and the passion, and the kingly craft, are left for others to delineate; but the "sumptuous theatre and lists royal" at the city of Coventry are set forth with wondrous exactness. We behold the High Constable and the High Marshal of England enter the lists with a great company of men in silk sendall, embroidered with silver, to keep the field. The duke of Hereford appears at the barriers, on his white courser barbed with blue and green velvet, embroidered with swans and antelopes of goldsmith's work; and there he swears

* "Richard II.," Act II., Scene III.

upon the Holy Evangelists that his quarrel is true and just; and he enters the lists, and sits down in a chair of green velvet. Then comes the King, with ten thousand men in harness; and he takes his seat upon a stage, richly hanged and pleasantly adorned. The Duke of Norfolk hovers at the entry of the lists, his horse being barbed with crimson velvet, embroidered with lions of silver and mulberry-trees: and he, having also made oath, enters the field manfully, and sits down in his chair of crimson velvet. One reader of Hall's pompous description of the lists at Coventry will invest that scene with something richer than velvet and goldsmith's work. He will make the champions speak something more than the formal words of the chivalric defiance; and yet the scene shall still be painted with the minutest ceremonial observance. We in vain look, at the present day, within the streets once enclosed by the walls of Coventry, for the lists where, if Richard had not thrown down his warder, the story of the wars of the Roses might not have been written. Probably in the days of the young Shakspere the precise scene of that event might have been pointed out. The manor of Cheylesmore, which was granted by Edward III. to the Black Prince for the better support of his honour as Duke of Cornwall, descended to his son Richard; and in the eighth year of his reign, "the walls on the south part of this city being not built, the mayor, bailiffs, and commonalty thereof humbly besought the King to give them leave that they might go forward with that work, who thereupon granted licence to them so to do, on condition that they should include within their walls his said manor-place standing within the park of Cheylesmore, as the record expresseth, which park was a woody ground in those times."* Encroached upon, no doubt, was this park in the age of Elizabeth. But Coventry would then have abundant memorials of its ancient magnificence which have now perished. He who wrote the glorious scene of the lists upon St. Lambert's day in all probability derived some inspiration from the *genius loci*.

The challenger and the challenged are each banished. John of Gaunt dies, and the King seizes upon the possessions of his dangerous son. Then begins that vengeance which is to harass England with a century of blood. Hall and Froissart make the Duke of Lancaster, after his landing, march direct to London, and afterwards proceed to the west of England. There can be no doubt that they were wrong; that the Duke, having brought with him a very small force, marched as quickly as possible into the midland counties, where he had many castles and possessions, and in which he might raise a numerous army among his own friends and retainers. The local knowledge of the poet, founded upon traditionary information, would have enabled him to decide upon the correctness of the statement which shows Bolingbroke marching direct from Ravenspurg to Berkeley Castle. The natural and easy dialogue between Bolingbroke and Northumberland exhibits as much local accuracy in a single line as if the poet had given us a laboured description of the Cotswolds:—

> "I am a stranger here in Glostershire.
> These high wild hills, and rough uneven ways,
> Draw out our miles, and make them wearisome."†

In a few weeks England sustains a revolution. The King is deposed; the great Duke is on the throne. Two or three years of discontent and intrigue, and then insurrection. Shrewsbury can scarcely be called one of Shakspere's native localities, yet it is clear that he was familiar with the place. In Falstaff's march from London to Shrewsbury the poet glances, lovingly as it were, at the old well-known scenes. "The red-nosed innkeeper at Daventry" had assuredly filled a glass of sack for him. The distance from Coventry to Sutton-Coldfield was accurately known by him, when he makes the burly commander say—"Bardolph, get thee before to

* Dugdale.

† "Richard II.," Act II., Scene III.

Coventry; fill me a bottle of sack: our soldiers shall march through: we'll to Sutton Cophill to-night."* Shakspere, it seems to us, could scarcely resist the temptation of showing the Prince in Warwickshire:—"What, Hal? How now, mad wag? What a devil dost thou in Warwickshire?" A word or two tells us that the poet had seen the field of Shrewsbury:—

> "How bloodily the sun begins to peer
> Above yon busky hill!"

The Chronicle informs us that Henry had marched with a great army towards Wales to encounter Percy and Douglas, who were coming from the north to join with Glendower; and then, "The King, hearing of the Earls' approaching, thought it policy to encounter with them before that the Welshman should join with their army, and so include him on both parts, and therefore returned suddenly to the town of Shrewsbury. He was scantly entered into the town, but he was by his posts advertised that the Earls, with banners displayed and battles ranged, were coming toward him, and were so hot and so courageous that they with light horses began to skirmish with his host. The King, perceiving their doings, issued out, and encamped himself without the east gate of the town. The Earls, nothing abashed although their succours them deceived, embattled themselves not far from the King's army." There was a night of watchfulness; and then, "the next day in the morning early, which was the vigil of Mary Magdalen, the King, perceiving that the battle was nearer than he either thought or looked for, lest that long tarrying might be a minishing of his strength, set his battles in good order." The scene of this great contest is well defined; the King has encamped himself without the east gate of Shrewsbury. The poet, by one of his magical touches, shows us the sun rising upon the hostile armies; but he is more minute than the chronicler. The King is looking eastward, and he sees the sun rising over a wooded hill. This is not only poetical, but it is true. He who stands upon the plain on the east side of Shrewsbury, the Battle Field as it is now called, waiting, not "a long hour by Shrewsbury clock," but waiting till the minute

> "when the morning sun shall raise his car
> Above the border of this horizon,"†

will see that sun rise over a "busky hill," Haughmond Hill. We may well believe, therefore, from this accuracy, that Shrewsbury had lent a local interest in the mind of Shakspere to the dramatic conception of the death-scene of the gallant Percy. Insurrection was not crushed at Shrewsbury; but the course of its action does not lie in the native district of the poet. Yet his Falstaff has an especial affection for these familiar scenes, and perhaps through him the poet described some of the "old familiar faces." Shallow and Silence, assuredly they were his good neighbours. We think there was a tear in his eye when he wrote, "And is old Double dead?" Mouldy, and Shadow, and Wart, and Feeble—were they not the representatives of the valiant men of Stratford, upon whom the corporation annually expended large sums for harness? Bardolph and Fluellen were real men, living at Stratford in 1592. After the treacherous putting down of rebellion at Gualtree Forest, Falstaff casts a longing look towards the fair seat of "Master Robert Shallow, Esquire." "My lord, I beseech you give me leave to go through Gloucestershire." We are not now far out of the range of Shakspere's youthful journeys around Stratford. Shallow will make the poor carter answer it in his wages "about the sack he lost the other

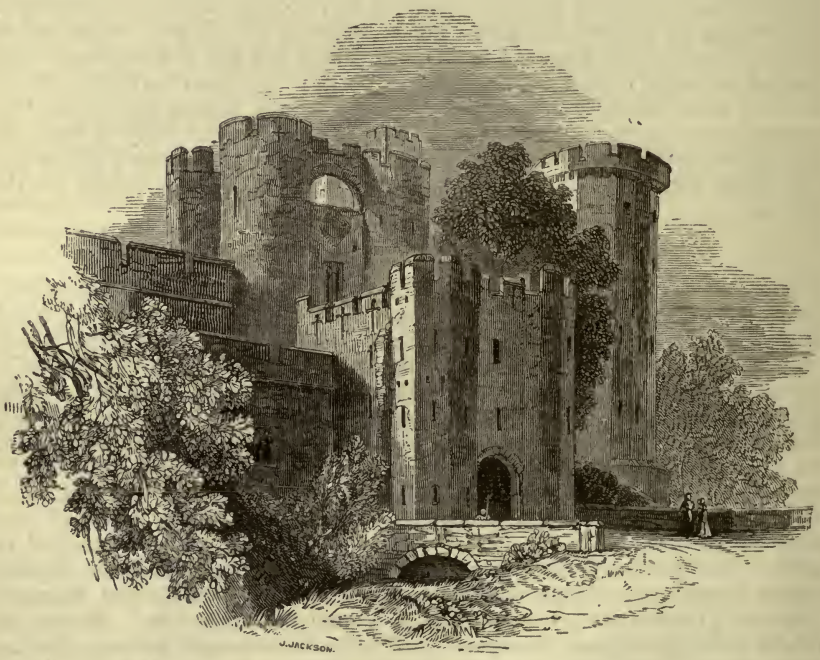
* All the old copies of The First Part of "Henry IV." have Cop-hill. There is no doubt that Sutton *Coldfield*, as it is now spelt, was meant by Cop-hill; but the old printers, we believe, improperly introduced the hyphen; for Dugdale, in his map, spells the word *Cofeild;* and it is easy to see how the common pronunciation would be *Cophill* or *Cofill.*

† "Henry VI.," Part III., Act IV., Scene VII.

day at Hinckley Fair." "William Visor of Wincot," that arrant knave who, according to honest and charitable Davy, "should have some countenance at his friend's request," was he a neighbour of Christopher Sly's "fat ale-wife of Wincot;" and did they dwell together in the Wincot of the parish of Aston-Clifford, or the Wilmecote of the parish of Aston-Cantlow? The chroniclers are silent upon this point; and they tell us nothing of the history of "Clement Perkes of the Hill." The chroniclers deal with less happy and less useful sojourners on the earth. Even "Goodman Puff of Barson," one of "the greatest men in the realm," has no fame beyond the immortality which Master Silence has bestowed upon him.

The four great historical dramas which exhibit the fall of Richard II., the triumph of Bolingbroke, the inquietudes of Henry IV., the wild career of his son ending in a reign of chivalrous daring and victory, were undoubtedly written after the four other plays of which the great theme was the war of the Roses. The local associations which might have influenced the young poet in the choice of the latter subject would be concentrated, in a great degree, upon Warwick Castle. The hero of these wars was unquestionably Richard Neville. It was a Beauchamp who fought at Agincourt in that goodly company who were to be remembered "to the ending of the world,"—

"Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester."



[Entrance to Warwick Castle.]

He ordained in his will that in his chapel at Warwick "three masses every day should be sung as long as the world might endure." The masses have long since ceased; but his tomb still stands, and he has a memorial that will last longer than

his tomb. The chronicler passes over his fame at Agincourt, but the dramatist records it. Did the poet's familiarity with those noble towers in which the Beauchamp had lived suggest this honour to his memory? But here, at any rate was the stronghold of the Neville. Here, when the land was at peace in the dead sleep of weak government, which was to be succeeded by fearful action, the great Earl dwelt with more than a monarch's pomp, having his own officer-at-arms called Warwick herald, with hundreds of friends and dependants bearing about his badge of the ragged staff; for whose boundless hospitality there was daily provision made as for the wants of an army; whose manors and castles and houses were to be numbered in almost every county; and who not only had pre-eminence over every Earl in the land, but, as Great Captain of the Sea, received to his own use the King's tonnage and poundage. When William Shakspere looked upon this castle in his youth, a peaceful Earl dwelt within it, the brother of the proud Leicester—the son of the ambitious Northumberland who had suffered death in the attempt to make Lady Jane Grey queen, but whose heir had been restored in blood by Mary. Warwick Castle, in the reign of Elizabeth, was peaceful as the river which glided by it, the most beautiful of fortress palaces. No prisoners lingered in its donjon keep; the beacon blazed not upon its battlements, the warder looked not anxiously out to see if all was quiet on the road from Kenilworth; the drawbridge was let down for the curious stranger, and he might refresh himself in the buttery without suspicion. Here, then, might the young poet gather from the old servants of the house some of the traditions of a century previous, when the followers of the great Earl were ever in fortress or in camp, and for a while there seemed to be no king in England, but the name of Warwick was greater than that of king.

In the connected plays which form the Three Parts of Henry VI., the Earl of Warwick, with some violation of chronological accuracy, is constantly brought forward in a prominent situation. The poet has given Warwick an early importance which the chroniclers of the age do not assign to him. He is dramatically correct in so doing; but, at the same time, his judgment might in some degree have been governed by the strength of local associations. Once embarked in the great quarrel, Warwick is the presiding genius of the scene:—

> "Now, by my father's badge, old Nevil's crest,
> The rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff,
> This day I 'll wear aloft my burgonet,
> As on a mountain-top the cedar shows
> That keeps his leaves in spite of any storm."*

The sword is first unsheathed in that battle-field of St. Albans. After three or four years of forced quiet it is again drawn. The "she-wolf of France" plunges her fangs into the blood of York at Wakefield, after Warwick has won the great battle of Northampton. The crown is achieved by the son of York at the field of Towton, where

> "Warwick rages like a chafed bull."

The poet necessarily hurries over events which occupy a large space in the narratives of the historian. The rash marriage of Edward provokes the resentment of Warwick, and his power is now devoted to set up the fallen house of Lancaster. Shakspere is then again in his native localities. He has dramatized the scene of Edward's capture at Wolvey, on the borders of Leicestershire. Edward escapes from Middleham Castle, and, after a short banishment, lands again with a few followers in England, to place himself a second time upon the throne, by a movement which has only

* "Henry VI.," Part II., Act v., Scene III.

one parallel in history.* Shakspere describes his countrymen, in the speech which the great Earl delivers for the encouragement of Henry:—

> "In Warwickshire I have true-hearted friends,
> Not mutinous in peace, yet bold in war;
> Those will I muster up."†

Henry is again seized by the Yorkists. Warwick, "the great-grown traitor," is at the head of his native forces. The local knowledge of the poet is now rapidly put forth in the scene upon the walls of Coventry:—

> "*War.* Where is the post that comes from valiant Oxford?
> How far hence is thy lord, mine honest fellow?
> 1 *Mess.* By this at *Dunsmore*, marching thitherward.
> *War.* How far off is our brother Montague?
> Where is the post that came from Montague?
> 2 *Mess.* By this at *Daintry*, with a puissant troop.
>
> *Enter Sir* JOHN SOMERVILLE.
>
> *War.* Say Somerville, what says my loving son?
> And, by thy guess, how nigh is Clarence now?
> *Som.* At *Southam* I did leave him with his forces,
> And do expect him here some two hours hence.
> [*Drum heard.*
> *War.* Then Clarence is at hand, I hear his drum.
> *Som.* It is not his, my lord; here *Southam* lies;
> The drum your honour hears marcheth from *Warwick*."

The chronicler tells the great event of the encounter of the two leaders at Coventry, which the poet has so spiritedly dramatized:—"In the mean season King Edward came to Warwick, where he found all the people departed, and from thence with all diligence advanced his power toward Coventry, and in a plain by the city he pitched his field. And the next day after that he came thither, his men were set forward and marshalled in array, and he valiantly bade the Earl battle: which, mistrusting that he should be deceived by the Duke of Clarence, as he was indeed, kept himself close within the walls. And yet he had perfect word that the Duke of Clarence came forward toward him with a great army. King Edward, being also thereof informed, raised his camp, and made toward the Duke. And lest that there might be thought some fraud to be cloaked between them, the King set his battles in an order, as though he would fight without any longer delay; the Duke did likewise."‡ Then "a fraternal amity was concluded and proclaimed," which was the ruin of Warwick and of the House of Lancaster. Ten years before these events, in the Parliament held in this same city of Coventry—a city which had received great benefits from Henry VI.—York, and Salisbury, and Warwick had been attainted. And now Warwick held the city for him who had in that same city denounced him as a traitor. With store of ordnance, and warlike equipments, had the great Captain lain in this city for a few weeks; and he was honoured as one greater than either of the rival Kings—one who could bestow a crown and who could take a crown away; and he sate in state in the old halls of Coventry, and prayers went up for his cause in its many churches, and the proud city's municipal officers were as his servants. He marched out of the city with his forces, after Palm Sunday; and on

* The landing of Bonaparte from Elba, and Edward at Ravenspurg, are remarkably similar in their rapidity and their boldness, though very different in their final consequences.

† "Henry VI.," Part III., Act v., Scene 1.

‡ Hall.

Easter Day the quarrel between him and the perjured Clarence and the luxurious Edward was settled for ever upon Barnet Field :—

> "Thus yields the cedar to the axe's edge,
> Whose arms gave shelter to the princely eagle;
> Under whose shade the ramping lion slept;
> Whose top-branch overpeer'd Jove's spreading tree,
> And kept low shrubs from winter's powerful wind."*

The Battle of Barnet was fought on the 14th of April, 1471. Sir John Paston, a stout Lancastrian, writes to his mother from London on the 18th of April :—"As for other tidings, it is understood here that the Queen Margaret is verily landed, and her son, in the west country, and I trow that as to-morrow, or else the next day, the King Edward will depart from hence to her ward to drive her out again."† Sir John Paston, himself in danger of his head, seems to hint that the landing of Queen Margaret will again change the aspect of things. In sixteen days the Battle of Tewksbury was fought. This is the great crowning event of the terrible struggle of sixteen years; and the scenes at Tewksbury are amongst the most spirited of these dramatic pictures. We may readily believe that Shakspere had looked upon the "fair park adjoining to the town," where the Duke of Somerset "pitched his field, against the will and consent of many other captains which would that he should have drawn aside;" and that he had also thought of the unhappy end of the gallant Prince Edward, as he stood in "the church of the Monastery of Black Monks in Tewksbury," where "his body was homely interred with the other simple corses."‡

There were twelve years of peace between the Battle of Tewksbury and the death of Edward IV. Then came the history which Hall entitles, "The Pitiful Life of King Edward the Fifth," and "The Tragical Doings of King Richard the Third." The last play of the series which belongs to the wars of the Roses is unquestionably written altogether with a more matured power than those which preceded it; yet the links which connect it with the other three plays of the series are so unbroken, the treatment of character is so consistent, and the poetical conception of the whole so uniform, that we speak of them all as the plays of Shakspere, and of Shakspere alone. Matured, especially in its wonderful exhibition of character, as the Richard III. is, we cannot doubt that the subject was very early familiar to the young poet's mind. The Battle of Bosworth Field was the great event of his own locality, which for a century had fixed the government of England. The course of the Reformation, and especially the dissolution of the Monasteries, had produced great social changes, which were in operation at the time in which Shakspere was born; whose effects, for good and for evil, he must have seen working around him, as he grew from year to year in knowledge and experience. But those events were too recent, and indeed of too delicate a nature, to assume the poetical aspect in his mind. They abided still in the region of prejudice and controversy. It was dangerous to speak of the great religious divisions of the kingdom with a tolerant impartiality. History could scarcely deal with these opinions in a spirit of justice. Poetry, thus, which has regard to what is permanent and universal, has passed by these matters, important as they are. But the great event which placed the Tudor family on the throne, and gave England a stable government, however occasionally distracted by civil and religious division, was an event which would seize fast upon such a mind as that of Shakspere. His ancestor, there can be little doubt, had been an adherent of the Earl of Richmond. For his faithful services to the conqueror at Bosworth he was rewarded, as we are assured, by lands in Warwickshire. That field of Bosworth

* "Henry VI.," Part III., Act v., Scene II.
† "Paston Letters," edited by A. Ramsay, vol. ii., p. 60. ‡ Hall.

would therefore have to him a family as well as a local interest. Burton, the historian of Leicestershire, who was born about ten years after William Shakspere, tells us "that his great-great-grandfather, John Hardwick, of Lindley, near Bosworth, a man of very short stature, but active and courageous, tendered his service to Henry, with some troops of horse, the night he lay at Atherston, became his guide to the field, advised him in the attack, and how to profit by the sun and by the wind."* Burton further says, writing in 1622, that the inhabitants living around the plain called Bosworth Field, more properly the plain of Sutton, "have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory, by reason that some persons thereabout, which saw the battle fought, were living within less than forty years, of which persons myself have seen some, and have heard of their disclosures, though related by the second hand." This "living within less than forty years" would take us back to about the period which we are now viewing in relation to the life of Shakspere. But certainly there is something over-marvellous in Burton's story to enable us to think that William Shakspere, even as a very young boy, could have conversed with "some persons thereabout" who had seen a battle fought in 1485. That, as Burton more reasonably of himself says, he might have "heard their discourses at second-hand" is probable enough. Bosworth Field is about thirty miles from Stratford. Burton says that the plain derives its name from Bosworth, "not that this battle was fought at this place (it being fought in a large flat plain, and spacious ground, three miles distant from this town, between the towns of Shenton, Sutton, Dadlington, and Stoke); but for that this town was the most worthy town of note near adjacent, and was therefore called Bosworth Field. That this battle was fought in this plain appeareth by many remarkable places: By a little mount cast up, where the common report is, that at the first beginning of the battle Henry Earl of Richmond made his parænetical oration to his army; by divers pieces of armour, weapons, and other warlike accoutrements, and by many arrow-heads here found, whereof, about twenty years since, at the enclosure of the lordship of Stoke, great store were digged up, of which some I have now (1622) in my custody, being of a long, large, and big proportion, far greater than any now in use; as also by relation of the inhabitants, who have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory."† Burton goes on to tell two stories connected with the eventful battle. The one was the vision of King Richard, of "divers fearful ghosts running about him, not suffering him to take any rest, still crying 'Revenge.'" Hall relates the tradition thus:—"The fame went that he had the same night a dreadful and a terrible dream, for it seemed to him, being asleep, that he saw divers images like terrible devils, not suffering him to take any quiet or rest." Burton says, previous to his description of the dream, "The vision is *reported* to be in this manner." And certainly his account of the fearful ghosts "still crying Revenge" is essentially different from that of the chronicler. Shakspere has followed the more poetical account of the old local historian; which, however, could not have been known to him:—

> "Methought the souls of all that I have murther'd
> Came to my tent: and every one did threat
> To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard."

Did Shakspere obtain his notion from the same source as Burton—from "relation of the inhabitants who have many occurrences and passages yet fresh in memory?"

King Henry is crowned upon the Field of Bosworth. According to the Chronicler, Lord Stanley "took the crown of King Richard, which was found amongst the spoil in the field, and set it on the Earl's head, as though he had been elected king by

* Hutton's "Bosworth Field."
† From "Burton's Manuscripts," quoted by Mr. Nicholls.

the voice of the people, as in ancient times past in divers realms it hath been accustomed." Then, "the same night in the evening King Henry with great pomp came to the town of Leicester," where he rested two days. "In the mean season the dead corpse of King Richard was as shamefully carried to the town of Leicester, as he gorgeously the day before with pomp and pride departed out of the said town."

Years roll on. There was another conqueror, not by arms but by peaceful intellect, who had once moved through the land in "pomp and pride," but who came to Leicester in humility and heaviness of heart. The victim of a shifting policy and of his own ambition, Wolsey, found a grave at Leicester scarcely more honourable than that of Richard :—

"At last, with easy roads, he came to Leicester,
Lodg'd in the abbey; where the reverend abbot,
With all his convent, honourably receiv'd him;
To whom he gave these words:—'O, father abbot,
An old man, broken with the storms of state,
Is come to lay his weary bones among ye;
Give him a little earth for charity!'
So went to bed: where eagerly his sickness
Pursued him still; and three nights after this,
About the hour of eight, (which he himself
Foretold should be his last,) full of repentance,
Continual meditations, tears, and sorrows,
He gave his honours to the world again,
His blessed part to heaven, and slept in peace." *

Wolsey is the hero of Shakspere's last historical play; and even in this history, large as it is, and belonging to the philosophical period of the poet's life, we may trace something of the influence of the principle of Local Association.

* "Henry VIII.," Act IV., Scene II.

[Leicester Abbey.]

[Evesham: The Bell Tower.]

CHAPTER V.

RUINS, NOT OF TIME.

"High towers, fair temples, goodly theatres,
Strong walls, rich porches, princely palaces,
Large streets, brave houses, sacred sepulchres,
Sure gates, sweet gardens, stately galleries,
Wrought with fair pillars and fine imageries;
All these, O pity! now are turn'd to dust,
And overgrown with black oblivion's rust."

Such is Spenser's noble description of what was once the "goodly Verlam." These were "The Ruins of Time." But within sixteen miles of Stratford would the young Shakspere gaze in awe and wonder upon ruins more solemn than any produced by "time's decay." The ruins of Evesham were the fearful monuments of a political

revolution which William Shakspere himself had not seen; but which, in the boyhood of his father, had shaken the land like an earthquake, and, toppling down its "high steeples," had made many

> "An heap of lime and sand,
> For the screech-owl to build her baleful bower."

Such were the ruins he looked upon, cumbering the ground where, forty years before, stood the magnificent abbey whose charters reached back to the days of the Kings of Mercia.

The last great building of the Abbey of Evesham is the only one properly belonging to the monastery which has escaped destruction. The campanile which formed an entrance to the conventual cemetery was commenced by Abbot Lichfield in 1533. In 1539 the good abbot resigned the office which he had held for twenty-six years. His successor was placed in authority for a few months, to carry on the farce which was enacting through the kingdom, of a voluntary grant and surrender of all the remaining possessions of the religious houses, which preceded the Act of 1539 "for dissolution of abbeys." Leland, who visited the place within a year or two after the suppression, "rambling to and fro in this nation, and in making researches into the bowels of antiquity."* says, "In the town is no hospital, or other famous foundation, but *the late* abbey." The destruction must indeed have been rapid. The house and site of the monastery were granted to Philip Hobby, with a remarkable exception; namely, "all the bells and *lead* of the church and belfry." The roof of this magnificent fabric thus went first; and in a few years the walls became a stone-quarry. Fuller, writing about a century afterwards, says of the abbey, "By a long lease it was in the possession of one Mr. Andrewes, father and son; whose grandchild, living now at Berkhampstead in Hertfordshire, hath better thriven, by God's blessing on his own industry, than his father and grandfather did with Evesham Abbey; the sale of the stones whereof he imputeth a cause of their ill success."† All was swept away. The abbey-church, with its sixteen altars, and its hundred and sixty-four gilded pillars,‡ its chapter-house, its cloisters, its library, refectory, dormitory, buttery, and treasury; its almory, granary, and storehouse; all the various buildings for the service of the church, and for the accommodation of eighty-nine religious inmates and sixty-five servants, were, with a few exceptions, ruins in the time of William Shakspere. Habingdon, who has left a manuscript "Survey of Worcestershire," written about two centuries ago, says, "Let us but guess what this monastery now dissolved was in former days by the gate-house yet remaining; which, though, deformed with age, is as large and stately as any at this time in the kingdom." That gateway has since perished. Of the great mass of the conventual buildings Habingdon states that nothing was left beyond "a huge deal of rubbish overgrown with grass." One beautiful gateway, however, formerly the entrance to the chapter-house, yet remains even to our day. It admits us to a large garden, now let out in small allotments to industrious inhabitants of Evesham. The change is very striking. The independent possession of a few roods of land may perhaps bestow as much comfort upon the labourers of Evesham as their former dependence upon the conventual buttery. But we cannot doubt that, for a long course of years, the sudden and violent dissolution of that great abbey must have produced incalculable poverty and wretchedness. Its princely revenues were seized upon by the heartless despot, to be applied to his unbridled luxury and his absurd wars. The same process of destruction and appropriation was carried on throughout the country. The Church, always a gentle landlord, was succeeded in its possessions by the grasping

* Wood, "Athenæ Oxon." † "Church History."
‡ Dugdale's "Monasticon," ed. 1819, vol. ii., p. 12.

creatures of the Crown; the almsgiving of the religious houses was at an end; and then came the age of vagabondage and of poor-laws.

[Chapter-House Gateway.]

The sense which we justly entertain of the advantages of the Reformation has accustomed us to shut our eyes to the tremendous evils which must have been produced by the iniquitous spoliations of the days of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. The religious houses, whatever might have been their abuses, were centres of civilization. Leland says, "There was no town at Evesham before the foundation of the abbey." Wherever there was a well-endowed religious house, there was a large and a regular expenditure, employing the local industry in the way best calculated to promote the happiness of the population. Under this expenditure, not only did handicrafts flourish, but the arts were encouraged in no inconsiderable degree. The commissioners employed to take surrender of the monasteries in Warwickshire reported of the nunnery of Polsworth, "that in this town were then forty-four tenements, and but one plough, the residue of the inhabitants being artificers, who had their livelihood by this house."* In another place Dugdale says, "Nor is it a little observable that, whilst the monasteries stood, there was no act for relief of the poor, so amply did those houses give succour to them that were in want; whereas in the next age, namely 39th of Elizabeth, no less than eleven bills were brought into the House of Commons for that purpose."† We have little doubt that the judicious encouragement of industry in the immediate neighbourhood of each monastery did a great deal more to render a state provision for the poor unnecessary than the accustomed "succour to those who were in want." The benevolence of the religious houses was systematic and uniform. It was not the ostentatious and improvident almsgiving which would raise up an idle pauper population upon their own lands. The poor, as far as we can judge from the acts of law-makers, did not become a curse to the country, and were not dealt with in the spirit of a detestable severity, until the law-makers had dried up the sources of their profitable industry. Leland, writing immediately after the dissolution of the Abbey of Evesham, says of the town that it is "meetly large and well builded with timber; the market-sted is fair and large; there be divers pretty streets in the town." While the abbey

* "Dugdale's "Warwickshire," p. 800. † Ibid., p. 803.

stood there was an annual disbursement there going forward which has been computed to be equal to eighty thousand pounds of our present money.* The revenues, principally derived from manors and tenements in eight different counties, are seized upon by the Crown. The site of the abbey is sold or granted to a private person, who will derive his immediate advantage by the rapid destruction of a pile of buildings which the piety and opulence of five or six centuries had been rearing. More than a hundred and fifty inmates of this monastery are turned loose upon the world, a few with miserable pensions, but the greater number reduced to absolute indigence. Half the population at least of the town of Evesham must have derived a subsistence from the expenditure of these inmates, and this fountain is now almost wholly dried up. In the youth of William Shakspere it is impossible that Evesham could have been other than a ruined and desolate place. It was the policy of the unscrupulous reformers—who, whatever service they may ultimately have worked in the destruction of superstitious observances, were, as politicians, the most dishonest and rapacious—it was their policy, when (to use their own heartless cant) they had driven away the crows and destroyed their nests, to heap every opprobrium upon the heads of the starving and houseless brethren, of whom it has been computed that fifty thousand were wandering through the land. The young Shakspere was in all probability brought into contact with some of the aged men who had been driven from the peaceful homes of their youth, where they had been brought up in scholastic exercises, and had looked forward to advance in honourable office, each in his little world. Some one of the Gray Friars of Coventry, or the Benedictines of

[Old House: Evesham.]

Evesham, must he have encountered, hovering round the scenes of their ancient prosperity; sheltered perhaps in the cottage of some old servant who could labour with his hands, and upon whom the common misfortune therefore had fallen lightly.

* "History of Evesham," by George May. A remarkably intelligent local guide.

The friars of the future great dramatist would, of necessity, be characters formed either out of his early observation, or moulded according to the general impressions of his early associates. In his mature life the race would be extinct. These his dramatic representations are wonderfully consistent; and it is manifest that he looked upon the persecuted order with pity and with respect. It was for Chaucer to satirize the monastic life in the days of its greatness and abundance. It was for this rare painter of manners to show the grasping dissimulating friar, sitting down upon the churl's bench, and endeavouring to frighten or wheedle the bed-ridden man out of his money:—

> "Thomas, nought of your tressor I desire
> As for myself, but that all our covent
> To pray for you is aye so diligent."

The ridicule in those times of the Church's pride might be salutary; but other days had come. The most just and tolerant moralist that ever helped to disencumber men of their hatreds and prejudices has consistently endeavoured to represent the monastic character as that of virtue and benevolence. One of Shakspere's earliest plays is "Romeo and Juliet;" and many of the rhymed portions of that delicious tragedy might have been the desultory compositions of a very young poet, to be hereafter moulded into the dramatic form. Such is the graceful soliloquy which first introduces Friar Lawrence. The kind old man, going forth from his cell in the morning twilight to fill his osier basket with weeds and flowers, and moralizing on the properties of plants which at once yield poison and medicine, has all the truth of individual portraiture. But Friar Lawrence is also the representative of a class. The Infirmarist of a monastic house, who had charge of the sick brethren, was often in the early days of medical science their sole physician. The book-knowledge and the experience of such a valuable member of a conventual body would still allow him to exercise useful functions when thrust into the world; and the young Shakspere may have known some kindly old man, full of axiomatic wisdom, and sufficiently confident in his own management, like the well-meaning Friar Lawrence. In "Much Ado about Nothing," it is the friar who, when Hero is unjustly accused by him who should have been her husband, vindicates her reputation with as much sagacity as charitable zeal:—

> "I have mark'd
> A thousand blushing apparitions start
> Into her face; a thousand innocent shames
> In angel whiteness bear away those blushes;
> And in her eye there hath appear'd a fire,
> To burn the errors that these princes hold
> Against her maiden truth:—Call me a fool;
> Trust not my reading, nor my observations,
> Which with experimental seal doth warrant
> The tenor of my book; trust not my age,
> My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
> If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
> Under some biting error."

In "Measure for Measure" the whole plot is carried on by the Duke assuming the reverend manners, and professing the active benevolence, of a friar; and his agents and confidants are Friar Thomas and Friar Peter. In an age when the prejudices of the multitude were flattered and stimulated by abuse and ridicule of the ancient ecclesiastical character, Shakspere always exhibits it so as to command respect and affection. The poisoning of King John by a monk, "a resolved villain," is despatched by him with little more than an allusion. The Germans believe that Shakspere wrote the old King John in two Parts. The vulgar exaggeration of the

basest calumnies against the monastic character satisfies us that the play was written by one who formed a much lower estimate than Shakspere did of the dignity of the poet's office, as an instructor of the people.

A deep reverence for antiquity is one of the clearest indications of the intimate union of the poetical and the philosophical temperament. An able writer of our own day has indeed said, "In some, the love of antiquity produces a sort of fanciful illusion: and the very sight of those buildings, so magnificent in their prosperous hour, so beautiful even in their present ruin, begets a sympathy for those who founded and inhabited them." * But, rightly considered, the fanciful illusion becomes a reasonable principle. Those who founded and inhabited these monastic buildings were for ages the chief directors of the national mind. Their possessions were, in truth, the possessions of all classes of the people. The highest offices in those establishments were in some cases bestowed upon the noble and the wealthy, but they were open to the very humblest. The studious and the devout here found a shelter and a solace. The learning of the monastic bodies has been underrated; the ages in which they flourished have been called dark ages; but they were almost the sole depositories of the knowledge of the land. They were the historians, the grammarians, the poets. They accumulated magnificent libraries. They were the barriers that checked the universal empire of brute force. They cherished an ambition higher and more permanent than could belong to the mere martial spirit. They stood between the strong and the weak. They held the oppressor in subjection to that power which results from the cultivation, however misdirected, of the spiritual part of our nature. Whilst the proud baron continued to live in the same dismal castle that his predatory fathers had built or won, the churchmen went on from age to age adding to their splendid edifices, and demanding a succession of ingenious artists to carry out their lofty ideas. The devotional exercises of their life touched the deepest feelings of the human heart. Their solemn services, handed down from a remote antiquity, gave to music its most ennobling cultivation; and the most beautiful of arts thus became the vehicle of the loftiest enthusiasm. Individuals amongst them, bringing odium upon the class, might be sordid, luxurious, idle, in some instances profligate. It is the nature of great prosperity and apparent security to produce these results. But it was not the mandate of a pampered tyrant, nor the edicts of a corrupt parliament, that could destroy the reverence which had been produced by an intercourse of eight hundred years with the great body of the people. The form of venerable institutions may be changed, but their spirit is indestructible. The holy places and mansions of the Church were swept away; but the memory of them could not be destroyed. Their ruins, recent as they were, were still antiquities, full of instruction. The lightning had blasted the old oak, and its green leaves were no longer put forth; but the gnarled trunk was a thing not to be despised. The convulsion which had torn the land was of a nature to make deep thinkers. After the wonder and the disappointment of great revolutions have subsided, there must always be an outgushing of earnest thought. The form which that thought may assume may be the result of accident; it may be poetical or metaphysical, historical or scientific. By a combination of circumstances,—perhaps by the circumstance of one man being born who had the most marvellous insight into human nature, and whose mind could penetrate all the disguises of the social state,—the drama became the great exponent of the thought of the age of Elizabeth. It was altogether a new form for English poetry to put on. The drama, as we have seen, had been the humblest vehicle for popular excitement. When the Church ceased to use it as an instrument of instruction, it fell into the hands of illiterate mimics. The courtly writers were too busy with their affectations and their flatteries

* Hallam's "Constitutional History of England."

to recognise its power, and its especial applicability to the new state of society. Those who were of the people; who watched the manifestations of the popular feeling and understanding; whose minds had been stirred up by the political storms, the violence of which had indeed passed away, but under whose influence the whole social state still heaved like a disturbed sea;—those were to build up our great national drama. But, at the period of which we are speaking, they were for the most part boys, or very young men. It is perhaps fortunate for us that the most eminent of these was introduced to the knowledge of life under no particular advantages; was not dedicated to any one of the learned professions; was cloistered not in an university; was an adherent of no party; was obliged to look forward to the necessity of earning his own maintenance, and yet not humiliated by poverty and meanness. William Shakspere looked upon the very remarkable state of society with which he was surrounded, with a free spirit. But he saw at one and the same time the present and the past. He knew that the entire social state is a thing of progress; that the characters of men are as much dependent upon remote influences as upon the matters with which they come in daily contact; that the individual essentially belongs to the general, and the temporary to the universal. His drama can never be antiquated, because he primarily deals with whatever is permanent and indestructible in the aspects of external nature, and in the constitution of the human mind. But, at the same time, it is no less a faithful transcript of the prevailing modes of thought even of his own day. Individual peculiarities, in his time called humours, he left to others.

This principle of looking at life with an utter disregard of all party and sectarian feelings, of massing all his observations upon individual character, could have proceeded only from a profound knowledge of the past, and a more than common apprehension of the future. As we have endeavoured to show, the localities amidst which he lived were highly favourable to his cultivation of a poetical reverence for antiquity. But his unerring observation of the present prevented the past becoming to him an illusion. He had always an earnest patriotism; he had a strong sense of the blessings which had been conferred upon his own day through the security won out of peril and suffering by the middle classes. The destruction of the old institutions, after the first evil effects had been mitigated by the energy of the people, had diffused capital, and had caused it to be employed with more activity. But he, who scarcely ever stops to notice the political aspects of his own day, cannot forbear an indignant comment upon the sufferings of the very poorest, which, if not caused by, were at least coincident with, the great spoliation of the property of the Church. Poor Tom, "who is whipped from tithing to tithing, and stocked, punished, and imprisoned,"* was no fanciful portrait; he is the creature of the pauper legislation of half a century. Exhortations in the churches, "for the furtherance of the relief of such as were in unfeigned misery," were prescribed by the statute of the 1st of Edward VI.; but the same statute directs that the unhappy wanderer, after certain forms of proving that he has not offered himself for work, shall be marked V with a hot iron upon his breast, and adjudged to be "*a slave*" for two years to him who brings him before justices of the peace; and the statute goes on to direct the slave-owner "to cause the said slave to work by beating, chaining, or otherwise." Three years afterwards the statute is repealed, seeing that it could not be carried into effect by reason of the multitude of vagabonds and the extremity of their wants. The whipping and the stocking were applied by successive enactments of Elizabeth. The gallows, too, was always at hand to make an end of the wanderers, when, hunted from tithing to tithing, they inevitably became thieves. Nothing but a compulsory provision for the maintenance of the poor could then have saved England from a

* "King Lear," Act III., Scene IV.

fearful Jacquerie. It cannot reasonably be doubted that the vast destruction of capital, by the dissolution of the monasteries, threw for many years a quantity of superfluous labour upon the yet unsettled capital of the ordinary industry of the country. The prodigious changes in the value of money, favourable as they ultimately were to the development of industry, raised the prices of commodities without raising wages,—an inevitable consequence of that natural law which makes wages wholly depend upon the number of the labourers. That Shakspere had witnessed much social misery is evident from his constant disposition to descry "a soul of goodness in things evil," and from his indignant hatred of the heartlessness of petty authority :—

"Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand."*

And yet, with many social evils about him, the age of Shakspere's youth was one in which the people were making a great intellectual progress. The poor were ill provided for. The Church was in an unsettled state, attacked by the natural restlessness of those who looked upon the Reformation with regret and hatred; and by the rigid enemies of its traditionary ceremonies and ancient observances, who had sprung up in its bosom. The promises which had been made that education should be fostered by the State had utterly failed; for even the preservation of the universities, and the protection and establishment of a few grammar-schools, had been unwillingly conceded by the avarice of those daring statesmen who had swallowed up the riches of the ancient establishment. The genial spirit of the English yeomanry had received a check from the intolerance of the powerful sect who frowned upon all sports and recreations—who despised the arts—who held poets and pipers to be "caterpillars of a commonwealth." But yet the wonderful stirring up of the intellect of the nation had made it an age favourable for the cultivation of the highest literature; and most favourable to those who looked upon society, as the young Shakspere must have looked, in the spirit of cordial enjoyment and practical wisdom.

* "Lear," Act IV., Scene VI.

[Bengeworth Church, seen through the Arch of the Bell-Tower.]

[Welford: The Wake.]

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAKE.

DECAY, followed by reproduction, is the order of nature; and so, if the vital power of society be not extinct, the men of one generation attempt to repair what the folly or the wickedness of their predecessors has destroyed. Sumptuous abbeys were pulled down in the reign of Henry VIII.; but humble parish-churches rose up in the reign of Elizabeth. Within four miles of Stratford, on the opposite bank of the Avon, is the pretty village of Welford; and here is a church which bears the date of 1568 carved upon its wall. Although the church was new, the people would cling, and perhaps more pertinaciously than ever, to the old usages connected with their church. They certainly would not forego their Wake,—"an ancient custom among the Christians of this island to keep a feast every year upon a certain week or day in remembrance of the finishing of the building of their parish-church, and of the first solemn dedicating of it to the service of God."* For fifty years after the period of which we are writing, the wakes prevailed, more or less, throughout England. The Puritans had striven to put them down; but the opposite party in the Church as zealously encouraged them. Charles I. spoke the voice of this party in one of his celebrated declarations for sports, which gave such deep, and in some

* Brand's "Popular Antiquities," by Ellis, 1841, vol. ii. page 1.

respects just, offence. In 1633 the King's declaration in favour of wakes was as follows :—"In some counties of this kingdom, his Majesty finds that, under pretence of taking away abuses, there hath been a general forbidding, not only of ordinary meetings, but of the feasts of the dedication of the churches, commonly called Wakes. Now, his Majesty's express will and pleasure is, that these feasts, with others, shall be observed; and that his justices of the peace, in their several divisions, shall look to it, both that all disorders there may be prevented or punished, and that all neighbourhood and freedom, with manlike and lawful exercises, be used."* Neighbourhood and freedom, and manlike exercises, were the old English characteristics of the wakes. At the period when William Shakspere was just entering upon life, with the natural disposition of youth, strongest perhaps in the more imaginative, to mingle in the recreations and sports of his neighbours with the most cordial spirit of enjoyment, the Puritans were beginning to denounce every assembly of the people that strove to keep up the character of merry England. Stubbes, writing at this exact epoch, says, describing "The manner of keeping of Wakesses," that "every town, parish, and village, some at one time of the year, some at another, but so that every one keep his proper day assigned and appropriate to itself (which they call their wake-day), useth to make great preparation and provision for good cheer; to the which all their friends and kinsfolks, far and near, are invited." Such were the friendly meetings in all mirth and freedom which the proclamation of Charles calls "neighbourhood." The Puritans denounced them as occasions of gluttony and drunkenness. Excess, no doubt, was occasionally there. The old hospitality could scarcely exist without excess. But it must not be forgotten that, whatever might be the distinction of ranks amongst our ancestors in all matters in which "coat-armour" was concerned, there was a hearty spirit of social intercourse, constituting a practical equality between man and man, which enabled all ranks to mingle without offence and without suspicion in these public ceremonials; and thus the civilization of the educated classes told upon the manners of the uneducated. There is no writer who furnishes us a more complete picture of this ancient freedom of intercourse than Chaucer. The company who meet at the Tabard, and eat the victual of the best, and drink the strong wine, and submit themselves to the merry host, and tell their tales upon the pilgrimage without the slightest restraint, are not only the very high and the very humble, but the men of professions and the men of trade, who in these latter days too often jostle and look big upon the debateable land of gentility. And so, no doubt, this freedom existed to a considerable extent even in the days of Shakspere. In the next generation, Herrick, a parish priest, writes,—

"Come, Anthea, let us two
Go to feast, as others do.
Tarts and custards, creams and cakes,
Are the junkets still at wakes:
Unto which the tribes resort,
Where the business is the sport."

With "the tribes" were mingled the stately squire, the reverend parson, and the well-fed yeoman; and, what was of more importance, their wives and daughters there exchanged smiles and courtesies. The more these meetings were frowned upon by the severe, the more would they be cherished by those who thought not that the proper destiny of man was unceasing labour and mortification. Some even of the most pure would exclaim, as Burton exclaimed after there had been a contest for fifty years upon the matter, "Let them freely feast, sing, and dance, have their

* Rushworth's "Collections," quoted in Harris's "Life of Charles I."

puppet-plays, hobby-horses, tabors, crowds, bagpipes, &c., play at ball and barley-breaks, and what sports and recreations they like best!"*

From sunrise, then, upon a bright summer morning, are the country people in their holiday dresses hastening to Welford. It is the Baptist's day. There were some amongst them who had lighted the accustomed bonfires upon the hills on the vigil of the saint; and perhaps a maiden or two, clinging to the ancient superstitions, had tremblingly sat in the church-porch in the solemn twilight, or more daringly had attempted at midnight to gather the fern-seed which should make mortals "walk invisible." Over the bridges at Binton come the hill people from Temple Grafton and Billesley. Arden pours out its scanty population from the woodland hamlets. Bidford and Barton send in their tribes through the flat pastures on either bank of the river. From Stratford there is a pleasant and not circuitous walk by the Avon's side, now leading through low meadows, now ascending some gentle knoll, where a long reach of the stream may be traced, and now close upon the sedges and alders, with a glimpse of the river sparkling through the green.

"Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a:
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a."†

The church-bells of Welford send forth a merry peal. There is cordial welcome in every house. The tables of the Manor Hall are set out with a substantial English breakfast; and the farmer's kitchen emulates the same bounteous hospitality. In a little while the church-tower sends forth another note. A single bell tolls for matins. The church soon fills with a zealous congregation; not a seat is empty. The service for this particular feast is attended to with pious reverence; and when the people are invited to assist in its choral parts, they still show that, however the national taste for music may have been injured by the suppression of the chauntries, they are familiar with the fine old chaunts of their fathers, and can perform them with spirit and exactness, each according to his ability, but the most with some knowledge of musical science. The homily is ended. The sun shines glaringly through the white glass of this new church; and some of the Stratford people may think it fortunate that their old painted windows are not yet all removed.‡ The dew is off the green that skirts the churchyard; the pipers and crowders are ready; the first dance is to be chosen. Thomas Heywood, one of Shakspere's pleasant contemporaries, has left us a dialogue which shows how embarrassing was such a choice:—

"*Jack.* Come, what shall it be? 'Rogero?'
Jenkin. 'Rogero?' no; we will dance 'The beginning of the world.'
Sisly. I love no dance so well as 'John, come kiss me now.'
Nicholas. I have ere now deserv'd a cushion; call for the 'Cushion-dance.'
Roger. For my part, I like nothing so well as 'Tom Tyler.'
Jenkin. No; we'll have 'The hunting of the fox.'
Jack. 'The hay, The hay;' there's nothing like 'The hay.'
Jenkin. Let me speak for all, and we'll have 'Sellenger's round.'"§

* "Anatomy of Melancholy," Part II., Sec. 2.

† "Winter's Tale," Act IV., Scene II. The music of this song is given in the "Pictorial Shakspere," and in Mr. Chappell's admirable collection of "English National Airs." We are indebted to Mr. Chappell for many of the facts connected with our ancient music noticed in the present chapter.

‡ "All images, shrines, tabernacles, roodlofts, and monuments of idolatry are removed, taken down, and defaced; only the stories in glass windows excepted, which for want of sufficient store of new stuff, and by reason of extreme charge that should grow by the alteration of the same into white panes throughout the realm, are not altogether abolished in most places at once, but by little and little suffered to decay, that white glass may be provided and set up in their rooms."—Harrison's "Description of England:" 1586.

§ "A Woman Killed with Kindness." 1600.

Jenkin, who rejects "Rogero," is strenuous for "The Beginning of the World," and he carries his proposal by giving it the more modern name of "Sellenger's Round." The tune was as old as Henry VIII.; for it is mentioned in "The History of Jack of Newbury," by Thomas Deloney, whom Kemp called the great ballad-maker:—"In comes a noise of musicians in tawny coats, who, taking off their caps, asked if they would have any music? The widow answered, 'No; they were merry enough.' 'Tut!' said the old man; 'let us hear, good fellows, what you can do; and play me 'The Beginning of the World.'" A quaint tune is this, by whatever name it be known—an air not boisterous in its character, but calm and graceful;—a round dance "for as many as will;" who "take hands and go round twice, and back again," with a succession of figures varying the circular movement, and allowing the display of individual grace and nimbleness:—

"Each one tripping on his toe,
Will be here with mop and mowe." *

The countryfolks of Shakspere's time put their hearts into the dance; and, as their ears were musical by education, their energy was at once joyous and elegant. Glad hearts are there even amongst those who are merely lookers-on upon this scene. The sight of happiness is in itself happiness; and there was real happiness in the "unreproved pleasures" of the youths and maidens

"Tripping the comely country-round
With daffodils and daisies crown'd." †

If Jenkin carried the voices for "Sellenger's Round," Sisly must next be gratified with "John, come kiss me now." Let it not be thought that Sisly called for a vulgar tune. This was one of the most favourite airs of Queen Elizabeth's "Virginal Book," and after being long popular in England it transmigrated into a "godly song" of Scotland. The tune is in two parts, of which the first part only is in the "Virginal Book," and this is a sweet little melody full of grace and tenderness. The more joyous revellers may now desire something more stirring, and call for "Packington's Pound," as old perhaps as the days of Henry VIII., and which survived for a couple of centuries in the songs of Ben Jonson and Gay.‡ The controversy about players, pipers, and dancers has fixed the date of some of these old tunes, showing us to what melodies the young Shakspere might have moved joyously in a round or a galliard. Stephen Gosson, for example, sneers at "Trenchmore." But we know that "Trenchmore" was of an earlier date than Gosson's book. A writer who came twenty years after Gosson shows us that the "Trenchmore" was scarcely to be reckoned amongst the graceful dances: "In this case, like one dancing the 'Trenchmore,' he stamped up and down the yard, holding his hips in his hands."§ It was the leaping, romping dance, in which the exuberance of animal spirits delights. Burton says—"We must dance 'Trenchmore' over tables, chairs, and stools." Selden has a capital passage upon "Trenchmore," showing us how the sports of the country were adopted by the Court, until the most boisterous of the dancing delights of the people fairly drove out "state and ancientry." He says, in his "Table Talk,"—"The Court of England is much altered. At a solemn dancing, first you had the grave measures, then the corantoes and the galliards, and this kept up with ceremony; and at length to 'Trenchmore' and the 'Cushion-dance:' then all the company dances, lord and groom, lady and kitchen-maid, no distinction. So in our

* "Tempest," Act IV., Scene II. † Herrick's "Hesperides."

‡ See Ben Jonson's song in "Bartholomew Fair," beginning—
"My masters, and friends, and good people, draw near."

§ Deloney's "Gentle Craft:" 1598.

Court in Queen Elizabeth's time, gravity and state were kept up; in King James's time things were pretty well; but in King Charles's time there has been nothing but 'Trenchmore,' and the 'Cushion-dance,' omnium gatherum, tolly polly, hoite come toite." It was in this spirit that Charles II. at a court ball called for "Cuckolds all arow," which he said was "the old dance of England."* From its name, and its jerking melody, this would seem to be one of the country dances of parallel lines. They were each danced by the people; but the round dance must unquestionably have been the most graceful. Old Burton writes of it with a fine enthusiasm:—"Joan's Placket," the delightful old tune that we yet beat time to, when the inspiriting song of "When I followed a lass" comes across our memories,† would be a favourite upon the green at Welford; and surely he who in after-times said, "I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg it was formed under the star of a galliard,"‡ might strive not to resist the attraction of the air of "Sweet Margaret," and willingly surrender himself to the inspiration of its gentle and its buoyant movements. One dance he must take part in; for even the squire and the squire's lady cannot resist its charms,—the dance which has been in and out of fashion for two centuries and a half, and has again asserted its rights in England, in despite of waltz and quadrille. We all know, upon the most undoubted testimony, that the Sir Roger de Coverley who to the lasting regret of all mankind caught a cold at the County Sessions, and died in 1712, was the great-grandson of the worthy knight of Coverley, or Cowley, who "was inventor of that famous country-dance which is called after him,"§ with its graceful advancings and retirings, its bows and curtsies, its chain figures, its pretty knots unravelled in simultaneous movement. In vain for the young blood of 1580, might old Stubbes denounce peril to body and mind in his outcry against the "horrible vice of pestiferous dancing." The manner in which the first Puritans set about making people better, after the fashion of a harsh nurse to a froward child, was very remarkable. Stubbes threatens the dancers with lameness and broken legs, as well as with severer penalties; but, being constrained to acknowledge that dancing "is both ancient and general, having been used ever in all ages as well of the godly as of the wicked," he reconciles the matter upon the following principle:—"If it be used for man's comfort, recreation and godly pleasure, *privately* (every sex distinct by themselves), whether with music or otherwise, it cannot be but *a very tolerable exercise.*" We doubt if this arrangement would have been altogether satisfactory to the young men and maidens at the Welford Wake, even if Philip Stubbes had himself appeared amongst them, with his unpublished manuscript in his pocket, to take the place of the pipers, crying out to them—"Give over, therefore, your occupations, you pipers, you fiddlers, you minstrels, and you musicians, you drummers, you tabretters, you fluters, and all other of that wicked brood."‖ Neither, when the flowing cup was going round among the elders to song and story, would he have been much heeded, had he himself lifted up his voice, exclaiming, "Wherefore should the whole town, parish, village, and country, keep one and the same day, and make such gluttonous feasts as they do?"¶ One young man might have answered, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?"**

* Pepys's "Memoirs," first 8vo., vol. i., p. 359. † "Love in a Village."
‡ "Twelfth Night," Act i., Scene iii. § "Spectator," Nos. 2 and 517.
‖ "Anatomy of Abuses." ¶ Ibid. ** "Twelfth Night," Act ii., Scene iii.

[Charlcote Church.]

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLCOTE.

CHARLCOTE:—the name is familiar to every reader of Shakspere; but it is not presented to the world under the influence of pleasant associations with the world's poet. The story, which was first told by Rowe, must be here repeated: "An extravagance that he was guilty of forced him both out of his country, and that way of living which he had taken up; and though it seemed at first to be a blemish upon his good manners, and a misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily proved the occasion of exerting one of the greatest geniuses that ever was known in dramatic poetry. He had, by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and, amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing engaged him more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlcote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and, in order to revenge that ill usage, he made a ballad upon him. And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree, that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwick-

shire for some time, and shelter himself in London." * The good old gossip Aubrey is wholly silent about the deer-stealing and the flight to London, merely saying, "This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess about eighteen." But there were other antiquarian gossips of Aubrey's age, who have left us their testimony upon this subject. The Reverend William Fulman, a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who died in 1688, bequeathed his papers to the Reverend Richard Davies of Sandford, Oxfordshire; and on the death of Mr. Davies, in 1708, these papers were deposited in the library of Corpus Christi. Fulman appears to have made some collections for the biography of our English poets, and under the name Shakspere he gives the dates of his birth and death. But Davies, who added notes to his friend's manuscripts, affords us the following piece of information: "Much given to all unluckiness, in stealing venison and rabbits; particularly from Sir Lucy, who had him oft whipped, and sometimes imprisoned, and at last made him fly his native country, to his great advancement. But his revenge was so great, that he is his Justice Clodpate and calls him a great man, and that, in allusion to his name, bore three louses rampant for his arms." The accuracy of this chronicler, as to events supposed to have happened a hundred years before he wrote, may be inferred from his correctness in what was accessible to him. Justice Clodpate is a new character; and the three louses rampant have diminished strangely from the "dozen white luces" of Master Slender. In Mr. Davies's account we have no mention of the ballad—through which, according to Rowe, the young poet revenged his "ill usage." But Capell, the editor of Shakspere, found a new testimony to that fact: "The writer of his 'Life,' the first modern, [Rowe] speaks of a 'lost ballad,' which added fuel, he says, to the knight's before-conceived anger, and 'redoubled the prosecution;' and calls the ballad 'the first essay of Shakespeare's poetry:' one stanza of it, which has the appearance of genuine, was put into the editor's hands many years ago by an ingenious gentleman (grandson of its preserver), with this account of the way in which it descended to him: Mr. Thomas Jones, who dwelt at Tarbick, a village in Worcestershire, a few miles from Stratford-on-Avon, and died in the year 1703, aged upwards of ninety, remembered to have heard from several old people at Stratford the story of Shakespeare's robbing Sir Thomas Lucy's park; and their account of it agreed with Mr. Rowe's, with this addition—that the ballad written against Sir Thomas by Shakespeare was stuck upon his park-gate, which exasperated the knight to apply to a lawyer at Warwick to proceed against him. Mr. Jones had put down in writing the first stanza of the ballad, which was all he remembered of it, and Mr. Thomas Wilkes (my grandfather) transmitted it to my father by memory, who also took it in writing."† The first stanza of the ballad which Mr. Jones put down in writing as all he remembered of it, has been so often reprinted, that we can scarcely be justified in omitting it. It is as follows:—

"A parliamente member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scare-crowe, at London an asse;
If lowsie is Lucy, as some volke miscalle it,
Then Lucy is lowsie, whatever befall it.
He thinkes himself greate,
Yet an asse is his state
We allowe by his eares but with asses to mate.
If Lucy is lowsie, as some volke miscalle it,
Sing lowsie Lucy, whatever befalle it."

But the tradition sprang up in another quarter. Mr. Oldys, the respectable anti-

* "Some Account of the Life of William Shakespear, written by Mr. Rowe."
† "Notes and various Readings to Shakspere," Part III., p. 75.

quarian, has also preserved this stanza, with the following remarks :—"There was a very aged gentleman living in the neighbourhood of Stratford (where he died fifty years since), who had not only heard from several old people in that town of Shakspeare's transgression, but could remember the first stanza of that bitter ballad, which, repeating to one of his acquaintance, he preserved it in writing, and here it is, neither better nor worse, but faithfully transcribed from the copy, which his relation very courteously communicated to me."* The copy preserved by Oldys corresponds word by word with that printed by Capell; and it is therefore pretty evident that each was derived from the same source,—the person who wrote down the verses from the memory of the one old gentleman. In truth, the whole matter looks rather more like an exercise of invention than of memory. Mr. De Quincey has expressed a very strong opinion "that these lines were a production of Charles II.'s reign, and applied to a Sir Thomas Lucy, not very far removed, if at all, from the age of him who first picked up the precious filth: the phrase 'parliament member' we believe to be quite unknown in the colloquial use of Queen Elizabeth." But he has overlooked a stronger point against the authenticity of the ballad. He says that "the scurrilous rondeau has been imputed to Shakspeare ever since the days of the credulous Rowe." This is a mistake. Rowe expressly says the ballad is "lost." It was not till the time of Oldys and Capell, nearly half a century after Rowe, that the single stanza was found. It was not published till seventy years after Rowe's "Life of Shakspeare." We have little doubt that the regret of Rowe that the ballad was lost was productive not only of the discovery, but of the creation, of the delicious fragment. By and by more was discovered, and the entire song "was found in a chest of drawers that formerly belonged to Mrs. Dorothy Tyler, of Shottery, near Stratford, who died in 1778, at the age of 80." This is Malone's account, who inserts the entire song in the Appendix to his posthumous "Life of Shakspeare," with the expression of his persuasion "that one part of this ballad is just as genuine as the other; that is, that the whole is a forgery." We believe, however, that the first stanza is an old forgery, and the remaining stanzas a modern one. If the ballad is held to be all of one piece, it is a self-evident forgery. But in the "entire song" the new stanzas have not even the merit of imitating the versification of the first attempt to degrade Shakspere to the character of a brutal doggrel-monger.

This, then, is the entire evidence as to the deer-stealing tradition. According to Rowe, the young Shakspere was engaged more than once in robbing a park, for which he was prosecuted by Sir Thomas Lucy; he made a ballad upon his prosecutor, and then, being more severely pursued, fled to London. According to Davies, he was much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits; for which he was often whipped, sometimes imprisoned, and at last forced to fly the country. According to Jones, the tradition of Rowe was correct as to robbing the park; and the obnoxious ballad being stuck upon the park-gate, a lawyer of Warwick was authorised to prosecute the offender. The tradition is thus full of contradictions upon the face of it. It necessarily would be so, for each of the witnesses speaks of circumstances that must have happened a hundred years before his time. We must examine the credibility of the tradition, therefore, by inquiring what was the state of the law as to the offence for which William Shakspere is said to have been prosecuted; what was the state of public opinion as to the offence; and what was the position of Sir Thomas Lucy as regarded his immediate neighbours.

The law in operation at the period in question was the 5th of Elizabeth, chapter 21. The ancient forest-laws had regard only to the possessions of the Crown; and therefore in the 32nd of Henry VIII. an Act was passed for the protection of "every inheritor and possessor of manors, land, and tenements," which made the killing of

* MS. Notes upon Langbaine, from which Steevens published the lines in 1778.

deer, and the taking of rabbits and hawks, felony. This Act was repealed in the 1st of Edward VI.; but it was quickly re-enacted in the 3rd and 4th of Edward VI. (1549 and 1550), it being alleged that unlawful hunting prevailed to such an extent throughout the realm, in the royal and private parks, that in one of the king's parks within a few miles of London five hundred deer were slain in one day. For the due punishment of such offences the taking of deer was again made felony. But the Act was again repealed in the 1st of Mary. In the 5th of Elizabeth it was attempted in Parliament once more to make the offence a capital felony. But this was successfully resisted; and it was enacted that, if any person by night or by day "wrongfully or unlawfully break or enter into any park empaled, or any other several ground closed with wall, pale, or hedge, and used for the keeping, breeding, and cherishing of deer, and so wrongfully hunt, drive, or chase out, or take, kill, or slay any deer within any such empaled park, or closed ground with wall, pale, or other enclosure, and used for deer, as is aforesaid," he shall suffer three months' imprisonment, pay treble damages to the party offended, and find sureties for seven years' good behaviour. But there is a clause in this Act (1562-3) which renders it doubtful whether the penalties for taking deer could be applied twenty years after the passing of the Act, in the case of Sir Thomas Lucy. "Provided always, That this Act, or anything contained therein, extend not to any park or enclosed ground hereafter to be made and used for deer, without the grant or licence of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, her heirs, successors, or progenitors." At the date of this statute Charlcote, it is said, was not a deer-park; was not an enclosed ground royally licenced. Mr. Collier has shown that the next Sir Thomas Lucy sent a present of a buck to Lord Keeper Egerton in 1602; and it is thence inferred that there were deer at Charlcote. No doubt. It appears to us that Malone puts the case against the tradition too strongly, when he maintains that Charlcote was not a licenced park in 1562; and that, therefore, its venison continued to be unprotected till the statute of the 3rd James I. The Act of Elizabeth clearly contemplates any "several ground" "closed with wall,

[Deer Barn: Fulbrooke.]

pale, or hedge, and used for the keeping of deer;" and as Sir Thomas Lucy built the mansion at Charlcote in 1558, it may reasonably be supposed that, at the date of the statute, the domain of Charlcote was closed with wall, pale, or hedge. The deer-stealing tradition, however, has grown more minute as it has advanced in age.

Charlcote, according to Mr. Samuel Ireland, was not the place of Shakspere's unlucky adventures. The Park of Fulbrooke, he says, was the property of Sir Thomas Lucy; and he gives us a drawing of an old house where the young offender was conveyed after his detection. Upon the Ordnance Map of our own day is the Deer Barn, where, according to the same veracious tradition, the venison was concealed. A word or two disposes of this part of the tradition: Fulbrooke did not come into the possession of the Lucy family till the grandson of Sir Thomas purchased it in the reign of James I. We have seen, then, that for ten years previous to the passing of the Act of Elizabeth for the preservation of deer there had been no laws in force except the old forest-laws, which applied not to private property. The statute of Elizabeth makes the bird-nesting boy, who climbs up to the hawk's eyrie, as liable to punishment as the deer-stealer. The taking of rabbits, as well as deer, was felony by the statutes of Henry VIII. and Edward VI.; but from the time of Henry VIII. to James I. there was no protection for rabbits; they were *ferœ naturœ*. Our unhappy poet, therefore, could not be held to steal rabbits, however fond he might be of hunting them; and certainly it would have been legally unsafe for Sir Thomas Lucy to have whipped him for such a disposition. Pheasants and partridges were free for men of all condition to shoot with gun or cross-bow, or capture with hawk. There was no restriction against taking hares except a statute of Henry VIII., which, for the protection of hunting, forbade tracking them in the snow. With this general right of sport it is scarcely to be expected that the statute against the taking of deer should be very strictly observed by the bold yeomanry of the days of Elizabeth; or that the offence of a young man should have been visited by such severe prosecution

[Charlcote House: From Avenue.]

as should have compelled him to fly the country. The penalty for the offence was a defined one. The short imprisonment might have been painful for a youth to bear, but it would not have been held disgraceful. All the writers of the Elizabethan

period speak of killing a deer with a sort of jovial sympathy, worthy the descendants of Robin Hood. "I 'll have a buck till I die, I 'll slay a doe while I live," is the maxim of the Host in "The Merry Devil of Edmonton;" and even Sir John, the priest, reproves him not: he joins in the fun. The dramatic, and even the serious, literature of Shakspere's youth treats deer-stealing as a venial offence; and naturally so, for public opinion attached no disgrace to it. A century later it was the same. White of Selborne says, "towards the beginning of this century all this country was wild about deer-stealing. Unless he was a hunter, as they affected to call themselves, no young person was allowed to be possessed of manhood or gallantry." With this loose state of public opinion, then, upon the subject of venison, is it likely that Sir Thomas Lucy would have pursued for such an offence the eldest son of an alderman of Stratford with any extraordinary severity? The knight was nearly the most important person residing in the immediate neighbourhood of Stratford. In 1578 he had been High Sheriff. At the period when the deer-stealing may be supposed to have taken place, he was seeking to be member for the county of Warwick, for which he was returned in 1584. He was in the habit of friendly intercourse with the residents of Stratford; for in 1583 he was chosen as an arbitrator in a matter of dispute by Hamnet Sadler, the friend of John Shakspere and of his son. All these considerations tend, we think, to show that the improbable deer-stealing tradition is based, like many other stories connected with Shakspere, on that vulgar love of the marvellous which is not satisfied with the wonder which a being eminently endowed himself presents, without seeking a contrast of profligacy, or meanness, or ignorance in his early condition, amongst the tales of a rude generation

[Charlcote House: From the Avon.]

who came after him, and, hearing of his fame, endeavoured to bring him as near as might be to themselves.

Charlcote, then, shall not, at least by us, be surrounded by unpleasant associa-

tions in connexion with the youth of Shakspere. It is, perhaps, the most interesting locality connected with his name; for in its great features it is essentially unchanged. There stands, with slight alteration, and those in good taste, the old mansion as it was reared in the days of Elizabeth. A broad avenue leads to its fine gateway, which opens into the court and the principal entrance. We would desire to people that hall with kindly inmates; to imagine the fine old knight, perhaps a little too puritanical, indeed, in his latter days, living there in peace and happiness with his family; merry as he ought to have been with his first wife, Jocosa (whose English name, Joyce, soundeth not quite so pleasant), and whose epitaph, by her husband, is honourable alike to the deceased and to the survivor. "All the time of her life a true and faithful servant of her good God; never detected of any crime or vice; in religion, most sound; in love to her husband, most faithful and true; in friendship, most constant; to what in trust was committed to her, most secret; in wisdom, excelling; in governing her house, and bringing up of youth in the fear of God, that did converse with her, most rare and singular. A great maintainer of hospitality; greatly esteemed of her betters; misliked of none unless of the envious. When all is spoken that can be said, a woman so furnished and garnished with virtue as not to be bettered, and hardly to be equalled of any. As she lived most virtuously, so she died most godly. Set down by him that best did know what hath been written to be true, Thomas Lucy." We can picture him planting the second avenue, which leads obliquely across the park from the great gateway to the porch of the parish-church. It is an avenue too narrow for carriages, if carriages then had been common; and the knight and his lady walk in stately guise along that grassy pathway, as the Sunday bells summon them to meet their humble neighbours in a place where all are equal. The relations between one in the social position of Sir Thomas Lucy, and his humble neighbours, could not have been otherwise than kindly ones. The epitaph in which he speaks of his wife as "a great maintainer of hospitality," is tolerable evidence of his own disposition. Hospitality, in those days, consisted not alone in giving mighty entertainments to the rich and noble, but it included the cherishing of the poor, and the welcome of tenants and dependents. The Squire's Hall was not, like the Baron's Castle, filled with a crowd of prodigal retainers, who devoured his substance, and kept him as a stranger amongst those who naturally looked up to him for protection. Yet was the Squire a man of great worship and authority. He was a justice of the peace; the terror of all depredators; the first to be appealed to in all matters of litigation. "The halls of the justice of the peace were dreadful to behold; the screen was garnished with corslets, and helmets gaping with open mouths, with coats of mail, lances, pikes, halberds, brown bills, bucklers."* The Justice had these weapons ready to arm his followers upon any sudden emergency; but, proud of his ancestry, his fighting-gear was not altogether modern. The "old worshipful gentleman who had a great estate" is described—

> "With an old hall, hung about with pikes, guns, and bows,
> With old swords, and bucklers, that had borne many shrewd blows."†

There was the broad oak-table in the hall, and the arm-chair large enough for a throne. Upon ordinary occasions the Justice would sit in his library, a large oaken room with a few cumbrous books, of which the only novelty was the last collection of the Statutes. The book upon which our knight bestowed much of his attention would be the famous book of John Fox: "Acts and Monuments of these latter and perillous Dayes, touching Matters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great Persecutions, and horrible Troubles, that have been wrought and practised by the Romishe Prelates." This book was next to his Bible. He hated

* Aubrey. † "The Old and Young Courtier."

Popery, as he was bound to do according to law; and he somewhat dreaded the inroads of Popery in the shape of Church ceremonials. He was not quite clear that the good man to whom he had presented the living of Charlcote was perfectly right in maintaining the honour and propriety of the surplice; but he did not altogether think that it was the "mark of abomination."* He reprobated the persecution of certain ministers "for omitting small portions or some ceremony prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer."† Those ministers were of the new opinions which men began to call puritanical. The good knight's visits to Stratford may be occasionally traced in the Chamberlain's accounts, especially upon solemn occasions, when he went thither with "my Lady and Mr. Sheriff," and left behind him such pleasant memorials as "paid at the Swan for a quart of sack and a quartern of sugar, burned for Sir Thomas Lucy."‡ The "sack and sugar" would, we think, indispose him to go along with the violent denouncers of old festivals; and those who deprecated hunting and hawking would be in his mind little better than fools. He had his falconer and his huntsman; and he had his blandest mien when he rode out of his gates with his hounds about him, and graciously saluted the yeomen who rode with him to find a hare in Fulbrooke.

* See Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book v.

† When in Parliament, in 1584, Sir Thomas Lucy presented a petition against the interference of ecclesiastical courts in such matters, wherein these words are used.

‡ Chamberlain's Accounts—Halliwell, p. 101.

[Daisy Hill.]

CHAPTER VIII.

SPORTS.

THERE is a book with which William Shakspere would unquestionably be familiar, the delightful "Scholemaster" of Roger Ascham, first printed in 1570, which would sufficiently encourage him, if encouragement were wanting, in the common pursuit of serious study and manly exercises. "I do not mean," says this fine genial old scholar, "by all this my talk, that young gentlemen should always be poring on a book, and, by using good studies, should lose honest pleasure and haunt no good pastime; I mean nothing less; for it is well known that I both like and love, and have always and do yet still use, all exercises and pastimes that be fit for my nature and ability. And beside natural disposition, in judgment also, I was never either stoic in doctrine, or Anabaptist in religion, to mislike a merry, pleasant, and playful nature, if no outrage be committed against law, measure, and good order. . . . . Therefore to ride comely; to run fair at the tilt or ring; to play at all weapons; to shoot fair in bow or surely in gun; to vault lustily; to run; to leap; to wrestle; to swim; to dance comely; to sing, and play of instruments cunningly; to hawk; to hunt; to play at tennis; and all pastimes generally which be joined with labour, used in open place, and in the daylight, containing either some fit exercise for war,

or some pleasant pastime for peace, be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary for a courtly gentleman to use."

To "ride comely," to "shoot fairly in bow, or surely in gun," "to hawk, to hunt," were pastimes in which William Shakspere would heartily engage. His plays abound with the most exact descriptions of matters connected with field-sports. In these exercises, "in open place and in the daylight," would he meet his neighbours; and we may assume that those social qualities which won for him the love of the wisest and the wittiest in his mature years, would be prominent in the frankness and fearlessness of youth. Learned men had despised hunting and hawking—had railed against these sports. Surely Sir Thomas More, he would think, never had hawk on fist, or chased the destructive vermin whose furs he wore, when he wrote, "What delight can there be, and not rather displeasure, in hearing the barking and howling of dogs?"* Erasmus, too, was a secluded scholar. Ascham appreciated these things, because he liked, and loved, and used them. With his "stone-bow" in hand would the boy go forth in search of quail or partridge. It was a difficult weapon—a random shot might hit a man "in the eye,"† but it was not so easy when the small bullet flew from the string to bring down the blackbird from the bush. There is abundant game in Fulbrooke. Ever since the attainder of John Dudley it had been disparked; granted by the Crown to a favourite, and again seized upon. A lovely woodland scene was this, in the days when Elizabeth took into her own hands the property which her sister had granted to Sir Henry Englefield, now a proscribed wanderer. The boy-sportsman is on Daisy Hill with his "birding-bow;" but the birds are for a while unheeded. He stops to gaze upon that glorious view of Warwick which is here unfolded. There, bright in the sunshine, at the distance of four or five miles, are the noble towers of the Beauchamps; and there is the lofty church beneath whose roof their pride and their ambition lie low. Behind him is his own Stratford, with its humbler spire. All around is laund and bush,—a spot which might have furnished the scene of the Keepers in Henry VI.:—

"1 *Keep.* Under this thick-grown brake we'll shroud ourselves;
For through this laund anon the deer will come;
And in this covert we will make our stand,
Culling the principal of all the deer.
2 *Keep.* I'll stay above the hill, so both may shoot.
1 *Keep.* That cannot be; the noise of thy cross-bow
Will scare the herd, and so my shoot is lost.
Here stand we both, and aim we at the best;"‡—

a spot to which many a fair dame had been led by gallant forester, with bow bent, and "quarrel" fitted:—

"*Prin.* Then, forester, my friend, where is the bush
That we must stand and play the murtherer in?
For. Here by, upon the edge of yonder coppice;
A stand, where you may make the fairest shoot."§

With the timid deer even the cross-bow scares the herd with its noise. But it was retained in "birding" long after the general use of fire-arms, that the covey might not be scattered. Its silent power of destruction was its principal merit.

But as boyhood is thrown off there are nobler pastimes for William Shakspere than those of gun and cross-bow. Like Gaston de Foix "he loved hounds, of all

* "Utopia," book ii., chap. 7.

† "O, for a stone-bow! to hit him in the eye."—Twelfth Night.

‡ "Henry VI.," Part III., Act III., Scene I. § "Love's Labour's Lost," Act IV. Scene I.

beasts, winter and summer."* He was skilled in the qualities of hounds: he delighted in those of the noblest breed,—

> "So flew'd, so sanded; and their heads are hung
> With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
> Crook-kneed and dew-lapp'd, like Thessalian bulls;
> Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
> Each under each."†

The chase in his day was not a tremendous burst for an hour or two, whose breathless speed shuts out all sense of beauty in the sport. There was harmony in every sound of the ancient hunt—there was poetry in all its associations. Such lines as those which Hippolita utters were not the fancies of a cloistered student:—

> "I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
> When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
> With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear
> Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,
> The skies, the fountains, every region near
> Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard
> So musical a discord, such sweet thunder."‡

The solemn huntings of princes and great lords, where large assemblies were convened to chase the deer in spaces enclosed by nets, but where the cook and the butler were as necessary as the hunter, were described in stately verse by George Gascoigne. "The noble art of Venerie" seems to have been an admirable excuse for ease and luxury "under the greenwood tree." But the open hunting with the country squire's beagles was a more stirring matter. By day-break was the bugle sounded; and from the spacious offices of the Hall came forth the keepers, leading their slow-hounds for finding the game, and the foresters with their greyhounds in leash. Many footmen are there in attendance with their quarter-staffs and hangers. Slowly rides forth the master and his friends. Neighbours join them on their way to the wood. There is merriment in their progress, for, as they pass through the village, they stop before the door of the sluggard who ought to have been on foot, singing "Hunt's up to the day:"—§

> "The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
> Sing merrily we, the hunt is up;
> The birds they sing,
> The deer they fling:
> Hey nony, nony-no:
> The hounds they cry,
> The hunters they fly:
> Hey troli lo, trololilo.
> The hunt is up."‖

It is a cheering and inspiriting tune—the *réveillée*—awakening like the "singing" of the lark, or the "lively din" of the cock. Sounds like these were heard, half a century after the youth of Shakspere, by the student whose poetry scarcely descended to the common things which surrounded him; for it was not the outgushing of the

* Lord Berners' "Froissart," book iii. chap. 26.
† "Midsummer Night's Dream," Act iv., Scene i.
‡ Ibid.
§ "Romeo and Juliet," Act iii., Scene v.
‖ Douce, "Illustrations of Shakspere," vol. ii., p. 192.

As he were sent a messenger to the moon,
In such a place flies, as he seems to say,
See me, or see me not! the partridge sprung,
He makes his stoop; but, wanting breath, is forced
To cancelier; then, with such speed, as if
He carried lightning in his wings, he strikes
The tumbling bird, who even in death appears
Proud to be made his quarry."*

The passage in which Massinger thus describes what had been presented to his observation is one of the many examples of the rare power which the dramatists of Shakspere's age possessed,—the power of seeing nature with their own eyes. But we may almost venture to say that this power scarcely existed in dramatic poetry before Shakspere taught his contemporary poets that there was something better in art than the conventional images of books—the shadows of shadows. The wonderful superiority of Shakspere over all others, in stamping the minutest objects of creation, as well as the highest mysteries of the soul of man, with the impress of truth, must have been derived, in some degree, from his education, working with his genius. All his early experience must have been his education; and we therefore are not attempting mere fanciful combinations of the individual with the circumstances of his social position, when we surround him with the scenes which belong to his locality, his time, and his condition of life.

[Marl-Cliffs: Near Bidford.]

The dwellers by a river have a natural familiarity with aquatic sports. The Avon would often witness an otter-hunt.

"Look! down at the bottom of the hill there, in that meadow, checkered with

* "The Guardian," Act I., Scene I. The speakers are *Durazza* and *Caldoro*.

water-lilies and lady-smocks ; there you may see what work they make ; look! look! you may see all busy ; men and dogs ; dogs and men; all busy." Thus does honest Izaak Walton describe such an animated scene. The otter-hunt is now rare in England ; but in those days, when field-sports had the double justification of their exercise and of their usefulness, the otter-hunt was the delight of the dwellers near rivers. Spear in hand, every root and hole in the bank is tried by watermen and landsmen. The water-dog, as the otter was called, is at length found in her fishy hole, near her whelps. She takes to the stream, amidst the barking of dogs and the shouts of men ; horsemen dash into the fordable places ; boatmen push hither and thither ; the dogs have lost her, and there is a short silence ; for one instant she comes up to the surface to breathe, and the dogs are after her. One dog has just seized her, but she bites him, and he swims away howling ; she is under again, and they are at fault. Again she rises, or, in the technical language, vents. "Now Sweetlips has her ; hold her, Sweetlips! Now all the dogs have her ; some above, and some under water : but now, now she is tired, and past losing." This is the catastrophe of the otter-hunt according to Walton. Somerville, in his grandiloquent blank verse, makes her die by the spears of the huntsmen.

When Izaak Walton and his friends have killed the otter, they go to their sport of angling. Shakspere in three lines describes "the contemplative man's recreation" as if he had enjoyed it :—

> "The pleasantest angling is to see the fish
> Cut with her golden oars the silver stream
> And greedily devour the treacherous bait." *

The oldest books upon angling have something of that half poetical, half devout enthusiasm about the art which Walton made so delightful. Even the author of the "Treatise of Fishing with an Angle," in the "Book of St. Albans," talks of "the sweet air of the sweet savour of the mead-flowers," and the "melodious harmony of fowls ;" and concludes the "Treatise" thus :—"Ye shall not use this foresaid crafty disport for no covetyseness to the increasing and sparing of your money only, but principally for your solace, and to cause the health of your body, and specially for your soul ; for when ye purpose to go on your disports in fishing, ye will not desire greatly many persons with you, which might let you of your game. And then ye may serve God devoutly in saying affectuously your customable prayer, and thus doing ye shall eschew and void many vices."† According to this good advice, with which he was doubtless familiar, would the young poet go alone to fish in the quiet nooks of his Avon.

The young Shakspere, whose mature writings touch lightly upon country sports, but who mentions them always as familiar things, would be the foremost in all manly diversions. He would "ride the wild mare with the boys,"‡ and "play at quoits well,"§ and "change places" at "handy-dandy,"‖ and put out all his strength in a jump, though he might not expect to win "a lady at leap-frog,"¶ and run the "country-base" with "striplings,"** and be a "very good bowler."†† It was not in solitude only that he acquired his wisdom. He knew

> "All qualities, with a learned spirit,
> Of human dealings," ‡‡

* "Much Ado about Nothing," Act III., Scene I.

† "The Treatyses perteynyng to Hawkynge, Huntynge, and Fisshynge with an Angle." 1496.

‡ "Henry IV.," Act II. Scene IV. § Ibid. ‖ "Lear," Act. IV., Scene VI.

¶ "Henry V.," Act V., Scene II. ** "Cymbeline," Act V., Scene IV.

†† "Love's Labour's Lost," Act V., Scene II. ‡‡ "Othello," Act III., Scene III.

through his intercourse with his fellows, and not by meditating upon abstractions. The meditation was to apply the experience and raise it into philosophy.

About a mile from the little town of Bidford, on the road to Stratford, was, some twenty years ago, an ancient crab-tree well known to the country round as Shakspere's Crab-tree. The tradition which associates it with the name of Shakspere is, like many other traditions regarding the poet, an attempt to embody the general notion that his social qualities were as remarkable as his genius. In an age when excess of joviality was by some considered almost a virtue, the genial fancy of the dwellers at Stratford may have been pleased to confer upon this crab-tree the honour of sheltering Shakspere from the dews of night, on an occasion when his merrymakings had disqualified him for returning homeward, and he had laid down to sleep under its spreading branches. It is scarcely necessary to enter into an examination of this apocryphal story. But as the crab-tree is associated with Shakspere, it may fitly be made the scene of some of his youthful exercises. He may "cleave the pin" and strike the quintain in the neighbourhood of the crab-tree, as well as sleep heavily beneath its shade. We shall diminish no honest enthusiasm by changing the association. Indeed, although the crab-tree was long ago known by the name of Shakspere's Crab-tree, the tradition that he was amongst a party who had accepted a challenge from the Bidford topers to try which could drink hardest, and there bivouacked after the debauch, is difficult to be traced further than the hearsay evidence of Mr. Samuel Ireland. In the same way, the merry folks of Stratford will tell you to this day that the Falcon inn in that town was the scene of Shakspere's nightly potations, after he had retired from London to his native home; and they will show you the shovel-board at which he delighted to play. Harmless traditions, ye are yet baseless! The Falcon was not an inn at all in Shakspere's time, but a goodly private dwelling.

About the year 1580 the ancient practice of archery had revived in England. The use of the famous English long-bow had been superseded in war by the arquebuss; but their old diversion of butt-shooting would not readily be abandoned by the bold yeomanry, delighting as they still did in stories of their countrymen's prowess, familiar to them in chronicle and ballad. The "Toxophilus" of Roger Ascham was a book well fitted to be amongst the favourites of our Shakspere; and he would think with that fine old schoolmaster that the book and the bow might well go together.* He might have heard that a wealthy yeoman of Middlesex, John Lyon, who had founded the grammar-school at Harrow, had instituted a prize for archery amongst the scholars. Had not the fame, too, gone forth through the country of the worthy "Show and Shooting by the Duke of Shoreditch, and his Associates the Worshipful Citizens of London,"† and of "The Friendly and Frank Fellowship of Prince Arthur's Knights in and about the City of London"?‡ There were men of Stratford who within a year or two had seen the solemn processions of these companies of archers, and their feats in Hogsden Fields; where the wealthy citizens and their ladies sat in their tents most gorgeously dressed, and the winners of the prizes were brought out of the field by torchlight, with drum and trumpet, and volleys of shot, mounted upon great geldings sumptuously trapped with cloths of silver and gold. Had he not himself talked with an ancient squire, who, in the

* "Would to God that all men did bring up their sons, like my worshipful master Sir Henry Wingefield, in the book and the bow."—ASCHAM.

† This is the title of a tract published in 1583; but the author says that these mock solemnities had been "greatly revived, and within these five years set forward, at the great cost and charges of sundry chief citizens."

‡ The title of a tract by Richard Mulcaster: 1581.

elder days, at "Mile End Green" had played "Sir Dagonet at Arthur's Show"?* And did he not know "old Double," who was now dead?—"He drew a good bow; and dead!—he shot a fine shoot: * * * Dead!—he would have clapped i' the clout at twelve score; and carried you a forehand shaft a fourteen and fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see."† Welcome to him, then, would be the invitation of the young men of Bidford for a day of archery; for they received as a truth the maxim of Ascham,—"That still, according to the old wont of England, youth should use it for the most honest pastime in peace." The butts are erected in the open fields after we cross the Ichnield way on the Stratford road. It is an elevated spot, which looks down upon the long pastures which skirt the Avon. These are not the ancient butts of the town, made and kept up according to the statute of Henry VIII.; nor do the young men compel their fathers, according to the same statute, to provide each of them with "a bow and two shafts," until they are of the age of seventeen; but each is willing to obey the statute, having "a bow and four arrows continually for himself." Their butts are mounds of turf, on which is fixed a small piece of circular paper with a pin in the centre. The young poet probably thought of Robin Hood's more picturesque mark:—

> "On every syde a rose garlonde,
> They shot under the lyne.
> 'Whoso fayleth of the rose garlonde,' sayd Robin,
> His takyll he shall tyne.'"

At the crab-tree are the young archers to meet at the hour of eight:—

> "Hold, or cut bowstrings."‡

The costume of Chaucer's squire's yeoman would be emulated by some of the assembly.—

> "He was cladde in cote and hode of grene;
> A shefe of peacock arwes bright and kene
> Under his belt he bare ful thriftily.
> Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly:
> His arwes drouped not with fetheres lowe.
> And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.
> . . . .
> Upon his arme he bare a gaie bracer."

The lots are cast; three archers on either side. The marker takes his place, to "cry aim." Away flies the first arrow—"gone"—it is over the butt; a second—"short;" a third—"wide;" a fourth "hits the white,"—"Let him be clapped on the shoulder and called Adam;"§ a fifth "handles his bow like a crow-keeper."‖ Lastly comes a youth from Stratford, and he is within an inch of "cleaving the pin." There is a maiden gazing on the sport; she whispers a word in his ear, and "then the very pin of his heart" is "cleft with the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft."¶ He recovers his self-possession, whilst he receives his arrow from the marker, humming the while—

> "The blinded boy, that shoots so trim,
> From heaven down did hie;
> He drew a dart and shot at him,
> In place where he did lie."**

* "Henry IV.," Part II., Act III., Scene II. † Ibid.
‡ "Midsummer-Night's Dream," Act I., Scene II. § "Much Ado about Nothing," Act I.
‖ "Lear." ¶ "Romeo and Juliet," Act II. Scene IV.
** Ballad of "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid."

[The Crab Tree.]

After repeated contests the match is decided. But there is now to be a trial of greater skill, requiring the strong arm and the accurate eye—the old English practice which won the day at Agincourt. The archers go up into the hills: he who has drawn the first lot suddenly stops; there is a bush upon the rising ground before him, from which hangs some rag, or weasel-skin, or dead crow; away flies the arrow, and the fellows of the archer each shoot from the same spot. This was the *roving* of the more ancient archery, where the mark was sometimes on high, and sometimes on the ground, and always at variable distances. Over hill and dale go the young men onward in the excitement of their exercise, so lauded by Richard Mulcaster, first Master of Merchant Tailors' School:—"And whereas hunting on foot is much praised, what moving of the body hath the foot-hunter in hills and dales which the roving archer hath not in variety of grounds? Is his natural heat more stirred than the archer's is? Is his appetite better than the archer's?"* This natural premonition sends the party homeward to their noon-tide dinner at the Grange. But as they pass along the low meadows they send up many a "flight," with shout and laughter. An arrow is sometimes lost. But there is one who in after-years recollected his boyish practice under such mishaps:—

> "In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft
> I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
> The self-same way, with more advised watch
> To find the other forth; and by adventuring both,
> I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof,
> Because what follows is pure innocence.

* "Positions:" 1581.

I owe you much; and, like a wilful youth,
That which I owe is lost: but, if you please
To shoot another arrow that self way
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
As I will watch the aim, or to find both,
Or bring your latter hazard back again,
And thankfully rest debtor for the first."*

Gervase Markham, in his excellent "English Housewife," describes "a humble feast or an ordinary proportion which any good man may keep in his family for the entertainment of his true and worthy friend." We doubt if so luxurious a provision was made in our yeoman's house of the Grange; for Markham's "humble feast" consisted of three courses, the first of which comprised sixteen "dishes of meat that are of substance." Harrison, writing about forty years earlier, makes the yeoman contented with somewhat less abundance: "If they happen to stumble upon a piece of venison, and a cup of wine or very strong beer or ale (which latter they commonly provide against their appointed days), they think their cheer so great, and themselves to have fared so well, as the Lord Mayor of London."† But, whatever was the plainness or the delicacy of their dishes, there is no doubt of the hearty welcome which awaited all those who had claims to hospitality: "If the friends of the wealthier sort come to their houses from far, they are commonly so welcome till they depart as upon the first day of their coming."‡ Again: "Both the artificer and the husbandman are sufficiently liberal and very friendly at their tables; and when they meet they are so merry without malice, and plain without inward Italian or French craft or subtility, that it would do a man good to be in company among them."§

Shakspere has himself painted, in one of his early plays, the friendly intercourse between the yeomen and their better educated neighbours. To the table where even Goodman Dull was welcome, the schoolmaster gives an invitation to the parson: "I do dine to-day at the father's of a certain pupil of mine; where if, before repast, it shall please you to gratify the table with a grace, I will, on my privilege I have with the parents of the aforesaid child or pupil, undertake your *ben venuto*."‖ And it was at this table that the schoolmaster won for himself this great praise: "Your reasons at dinner have been sharp and sententious, pleasant without scurrility, witty without affection, audacious without impudency, learned without opinion, and strange without heresy."¶ England was at that day not cursed with class and coterie society. The distinctions of rank were sufficiently well defined to enable men to mix freely, as long as they conducted themselves decorously. The barriers of modern society belong to an age of pretension.

There are other sports to be played, and other triumphs to be achieved, before the day closes. In the meadow, at some little distance from the butts, is fixed a machine of singular construction. It is the Quintain. Horsemen are beginning to assemble around it, and are waiting the arrival of the guests from the Grange, who are merry in "an arbour" of mine host's "orchard." But the youths are for more stirring matters; and their horses are ready. To the inexperienced eye the machine which has been erected in the field—

"That which here stands up,
Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block."**

It is the wooden figure of a Saracen, sword in hand, grinning hideously upon the assailants who confront him. The horsemen form a lane on either side, whilst one,

* "The Merchant of Venice," Act I., Scene I.
† "Description of England," 1586, p. 170. ‡ Ibid., p. 168. § Ibid.
‖ "Love's Labour's Lost," Act IV., Scene II. ¶ Ibid., Act V., Scene I.
** "As You Like It," Act I., Scene III.

the boldest of challengers, couches his spear and rides violently at the enemy, who appears to stand firm upon his wooden post. The spear strikes the Saracen just on the left shoulder; but the wooden man receives not his wound with patience, for by the action of the blow he swings round upon his pivot, and hits the horseman a formidable thump with his extended sword before the horse has cleared the range of the misbeliever's weapon. Then one chorus of laughter greets the unfortunate rider as he comes dolefully back to the rear. Another and another fail. At last the quintain is struck right in the centre, and the victory is won. The Saracen conquered, a flat board is set up upon the pivot, with a sand-bag at one end, such as Stow has described:—"I have seen a quintain set up on Cornhill, by Leadenhall, where the attendants of the lords of merry disports have run and made great pastime; for he that hit not the board end of the quintain was laughed to scorn; and he that hit it full, if he rode not the faster, had a sound blow upon his neck with a bag full of sand hanged on the other end."* The merry guests of the Grange enjoy the sport as heartily as Master Laneham, who saw the quintain at Kenilworth:—"The speciality of the sport was to see how some of his slackness had a good bob with the bag; and some for his haste to topple downright, and come tumbling to the post: some striving so much at the first setting out, that it seemed a question between the man and the beast, whether the course should be made a horseback or a foot: and, put forth with the spurs, then would run his race by us among the thickest of the throng, that down came they together hand over head. * * * By my troth, Master Martin, 't was a goodly pastime." And now they go to supper,

"What time the labour'd ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came."†

* "Survey of London." † Milton: "Comus."

[Bidford Grange.]

[Hampton Lucy: from Road near Alveston.]

CHAPTER IX.

SOLITARY HOURS.

THE poet who has described a man of savage wildness, cherishing "unshaped, half-human thoughts" in his wanderings among vales and streams, green wood and hollow dell, has said that nature ne'er could find the way into his heart :—

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

These are lines at which some of the worldly-wise and clever have been wont to laugh ; but they contain a deep and universal truth. Without some association, the most beautiful objects in nature have no charm ; with association, the commonest acquire a value. The very humblest power of observation is necessarily dependent upon some higher power of the mind. Those who observe differ from those who do not observe, in the possession of acquired knowledge, or original reflection, which is to guide the observation. The observer who sees accurately, who knows what others have observed, and who applies this knowledge only to the humble purpose of adding a new flower or insect to his collection, we call a naturalist. But there are naturalists, worthy of the name, who, without bringing any very high powers of mind to their observation of nature, still show, not only by the minuteness and accuracy of

their eye, but by their genial love and admiration of the works of the Creator, that with them nature has found the way into the heart. Such was White of Selborne. We delight to hear him describe the mouse's nest which he found suspended in the head of a thistle; or how a gentleman had two milk-white rooks in one nest: we partake in his happiness when he writes of what was to him an event: "This morning I saw the golden-crowned wren whose crown glitters like burnished gold;" and we half suspect that the good old gentleman had the spirit of poetry in him when he says of the goat-sucker, "This bird is most punctual in beginning its song exactly at the close of day; so exactly that I have known it strike up more than once or twice just at the report of the Portsmouth evening gun." He wrote verses; but they are not so poetical as his prose. A naturalist endowed with higher powers of association has taught us how philosophy looks upon the common aspects of the outer world. Davy was a scientific observer. He shows us the reason of the familiar prognostications of the weather—the coppery sunset, the halo round the moon, the rainbow at night, the flight of the swallow. Even omens have a touch of science in them; and there is a philosophical difference in the luck of seeing one magpie or two. But there is an observer of nature who looks upon all animate and inanimate existence with a higher power of association even than these. It is the poetical naturalist. Of this rare class our Shakspere is decidedly the head. Let us endeavour to understand what his knowledge of external nature was, how it was applied, and how it was acquired.

Some one is reported to have said that he could affirm from the evidence of his "Seasons" that Thomson was an early riser. Thomson, it is well known, duly slept till noon. Bearing in mind this practical rebuke of what is held to be internal evidence, we still shall not hesitate to affirm our strong conviction that the Shakspere of the country was an early riser. Thomson, professedly a descriptive poet, assuredly described many things that he never saw. He looked at nature very often with the eyes of others. To our mind his celebrated description of morning offers not the slightest proof that he ever saw the sun rise.* In this description we have the meek-eyed morn, the dappled east, brown night, young day, the dripping rock, the misty mountain: the hare limps from the field; the wild deer trip from the glade; music awakes in woodland hymns; the shepherd drives his flock from the fold; the sluggard sleeps:—

> "But yonder comes the powerful king of day,
> Rejoicing in the east! The lessening cloud,
> The kindling azure, and the mountain's brow,
> Illum'd with fluid gold, his near approach
> Betoken glad. Lo, now apparent all,
> Aslant the dew-bright earth and colour'd air,
> He looks in boundless majesty abroad,
> And sheds the shining day, that burnish'd plays
> On rocks, and hills, and towers, and wandering streams,
> High-gleaming from afar."

This is conventional poetry, the reflection of books;—excellent of its kind, but still not the production of a poet-naturalist. Compare it with Chaucer:—

> "The besy larke, the messanger of day,
> Saleweth in hire song the morwe gray;
> And firy Phebus riseth up so bright,
> That all the orient laugheth of the sight,
> And with his stremes drieth in the greves
> The silver dropes, hanging on the leves." †

* "Summer." Line 43 to 96. † "The Knight's Tale." Line 1493.

The sun drying the dewdrops on the leaves is not a book image. The brilliancy, the freshness, are as true as they are beautiful. Of such stuff are the natural descriptions of Shakspere always made. He is as minute and accurate as White; he is more philosophical than Davy. The carrier in the inn-yard at Rochester exclaims, "An 't be not four by the day, I 'll be hanged: Charles' wain is over the new chimney."* Here is the very commonest remark of a common man; and yet the principle of ascertaining the time of the night by the position of a star in relation to a fixed object must have been the result of observation in him who dramatized the scene. The variation of the quarter in which the sun rises according to the time of the year may be a trite problem to scientific readers; but it must have been a familiar *fact* to him who, with marvellous art, threw in a dialogue upon the incident, to diversify and give repose to the pause in a scene of overwhelming interest:—

"*Decius.* Here lies the east: doth not the day break here?
Casca. No.
Cinna. O, pardon, sir, it doth; and yon gray lines,
That fret the clouds, are messengers of day.
Casca. You shall confess that you are both deceived.
Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises;
Which is a great way growing on the south,
Weighing the youthful season of the year.
Some two months hence up higher toward the north
He first presents his fire; and the high east
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here." †

It was in his native fields that Shakspere had seen morning under every aspect;—now, "in russet mantle clad;" now, opening her "golden gates." A mighty battle is compared to the morning's war:—

"When dying clouds contend with growing light."

Perhaps this might have been copied, or imagined; but the poet throws in a reality, which leaves no doubt that it had been *seen*:—

"What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day, nor night." ‡

What but actual observation could have told the poet that the thin flakes of ice which he calls "flaws" are suddenly produced by the coldness of the morning just before sunrise? The fact abided in his mind till it shaped itself into a comparison with the peculiarities in the character of his Prince Henry:—

"As humorous as winter, and as sudden
As flaws congealed in the spring of day."

He has painted his own Romeo, when under the influence of a fleeting first love, stealing "into the covert of the wood,"

"An hour before the worshipp'd sun
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east." §

A melancholy and a joyous spirit would equally have tempted the young poet to

* "Henry IV.," Part I., Act II., Scene I.
† "Julius Cæsar," Act. II., Scene I. ‡ "Henry VI.," Part III., Act II., Scene V.
§ "Romeo and Juliet," Act I., Scene I.

court the solitudes that were around him. Whether his "affections" were to be "most busied when most alone;"* or, objectless,

> "Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy;"†

or intent upon a favourite book; or yielding to the imagination which "bodies forth the forms of things unknown,"—many of the vacant hours of the young man would be solitary hours in his own fields. Yet, whatever was the pervading train of thought, he would still be an observer. In the vast storehouse of his mind would all that he observed be laid up; not labelled and classified after the fashion of some poetical manufacturers, but to be called into use at a near or a distant day, by that wonderful power of assimilation which perceives all the subtile and delicate relations between the moral and the physical worlds, and thus raises the objects of sense into a companionship with the loftiest things that belong to the fancy and the reason. Who ever *painted* with such marvellous power—we use the word advisedly—the changing forms of an evening sky, "black vesper's pageants?"—

> "Sometime we see a cloud that 's dragonish;
> A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
> And mock our eyes with air." ‡

This is noble painting, but it is something higher. When Antony goes on to compare *himself* to the cloud which "even with a thought the rack dislimns," we learn how the great poet uses his observation of nature. Not only do such magnificent objects as these receive an elevation from the poet's moral application of them, but the commonest things, even the vulgarest things, ludicrous but for their management, become in the highest degree poetical. Many a time in the low meadows of the Avon would Shakspere have seen the irritation of the herd under the torments of the gad-fly. The poet takes this common thing to describe an event which changed the destinies of the world:—

> "Yon ribald nag of Egypt,
> Whom leprosy o'ertake! i' the midst o' the fight,—
> When vantage like a pair of twins appear'd,
> Both as the same, or rather ours the elder,—
> The *brize* upon her, like a cow in June,
> Hoists sails, and flies," §

When Hector is in the field,

> "The strawy Greeks, ripe for his edge,
> Fall down before him, like the mower's swath." ‖

Brutus, speculating upon the probable consequences of Cæsar becoming king, exclaims—

> "It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
> And that craves wary walking." ¶

* "Romeo and Juliet," Act I., Scene I. † "As You Like It," Act IV., Scene III.
‡ "Antony and Cleopatra," Act IV., Scene XII. § Ibid., Act III., Scene VIII.
‖ "Troilus and Cressida," Act V., Scene V. ¶ "Julius Cæsar," Act II., Scene I.

[Meadows near Welford.]

The same object had been seen and described in an earlier play, without its grand association :—

"The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun." *

The snake seems a liege subject of the domain of poetry. Her enamel skin is a weed for a fairy ;† the green and gilded snake wreathed around the sleeping man‡ is a picture. But what ordinary writer would not shrink from the poetical handling of a snail ? It is the surpassing accuracy of the naturalist that has introduced the snail into one of the noblest passages of the poet, in juxta-position with the Hesperides and Apollo's lute :—

"Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails." §

One of the grandest scenes of a tragedy of the mature poet is full of the most familiar images derived from an accurate observation of the natural world. The images seem to rise up spontaneously out of the minute recollections of a life spent in watching the movements of the lower creation. "A deed of dreadful note" is to be done before nightfall. The bat, the beetle, and the crow, are the common, and therefore the most appropriate, instruments which are used to mark the approach of night. The simplest thing of life is thus raised into sublimity at a touch :—

"Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight ;"

ere

"The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal ;"

* "Titus Andronicus," Act II., Scene III.
† "A Midsummer's-Night's Dream," Act II., Sc. II.
‡ "As You Like It," Act IV., Scene III.
§ "Love's Labour's Lost," Act. IV. Scene I.

the murder of Banquo is to be done. The very time is at hand :—

> "Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood." *

The naturalist has not only heard the "drowsy hums" of the beetle as he wandered in the evening twilight, but he has traced the insect to its hiding-place. The poet associates the fact with a great lesson,—to be content in obscure safety :—

> "Often, to our comfort, shall we find
> The sharded beetle in a safer hold
> Than is the full-wing'd eagle." †

Let it not be forgotten that the young Shakspere had to make himself a naturalist. Books of accurate observation there were none to guide him ; for the popular works of natural history, of which there were very few, were full of extravagant fables and vague descriptions. Mr. Douce has told us that Shakspere was extremely well acquainted with one of these works—"Batman uppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum, 1582 ;" and he has ascertained that the original price of this volume was eight shillings. But Shakspere did not go to Bartholomeus or to Batman (who made large additions to the original work from Gesner), for his truths in natural history. Mr. Douce has cited many passages in his "Illustrations," in which he traces Shakspere to Bartholomeus. We have gone carefully through the volumes where these are scattered up and down, and we find a remarkable circumstance unnoticed by Mr. Douce, that these passages, with scarcely an exception, refer to the vulgar errors of natural history which Shakspere has transmuted into never-dying poetry. It is here that we find the origin of the toad which wears "a precious jewel in his head ;"‡ of the phœnix of Arabia ;§ of the basilisk that kills the innocent gazer ;‖ of the unlicked bear-whelp.¶ But the truths of natural history which we constantly light upon in Shakspere were all essentially derived from his own observation. There is a remarkable instance in his discrimination between the popular belief and the scientific truth in his notice of the habits of the cuckoo. The Fool in Lear expresses the popular belief in a proverbial sentence :—

> "For *you trow*, nuncle,
> The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long
> That it had its head bit off by its young."

Worcester, in his address to Henry IV., expresses the scientific fact without the vulgar exaggeration,—a fact unnoticed till the time of Dr. Jenner by any writer but the naturalist William Shakspere :—

> "Being fed by us, you used us so
> As that ungentle gull the cuckoo's bird
> Useth the sparrow : did *oppress our nest ;*
> Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk,
> That even our love durst not come near your sight."

The noble description of the commonwealth of bees in Henry V. was suggested, in all probability, by a similar description in Lyly's "Euphues." But Shakspere's description not only displays the wonderful accuracy of his observation, in subser-

* "Macbeth," Act III., Scene II.
† "Cymbeline," Act III. Scene III.
‡ "As You Like It," Act II., Scene I.
§ "Tempest," Act III., Scene II.
‖ "Henry VI.," Part II., Act III., Scene II.
¶ Ibid. Part III., Act III., Scene II.

vience to the poetical art, but the unerring discrimination of his philosophy. Lyly makes his bees exercise the reasoning faculty—*choose* a king, *call* a parliament, *consult* for laws, *elect* officers; Shakspere says "they *have* a king and officers;" and he refers their operations to "a rule in nature." The same accuracy that he brought to the observation of the workings of nature in the fields, he bestows upon the assistant labours of art in the garden. The fine dialogue between the old gardener at Langley and the servants, is full of technical information. The great principles of horticultural economy, pruning and weeding, are there as clearly displayed as in the most anti-poetical of treatises. We have the crab-tree slip grafted upon noble stock (the reverse of the gardener's practice) in one play:* in another we have the luxurious "scions put in wild and savage stock."† A writer in a technical periodical work seriously maintains that Shakspere was a professional gardener.‡ This is better evidence of the poet's horticultural acquirements than Steevens's pert remark, "Shakspeare seems to have had little knowledge in gardening."§ Shakspere's philosophy of the gardener's art is true of all art. It is the great Platonic belief which raises art into something much higher than a thing of mere imitation, showing the great informing spirit of the universe working through man, as through any other agency of his will:—

"*Per.* Sir, the year growing ancient,—
Nor yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter,—the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations, and streak'd gilly 'vors,
Which some call nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden 's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.
Pol. Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?
Per. For I have heard it said,
There is an art which, in their piedness, shares
With great creating nature.
Pol. Say, there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock;
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: This is an art
Which does mend nature,—change it rather: but
The art itself is nature."‖

Perdita's flowers! who can mention them, and not think of the wonderful union of the accuracy of the naturalist with the loveliest images of the poet? It has been well remarked that in Milton's "Lycidas" we have "among vernal flowers many of those which are the offspring of Midsummer;" but Shakspere distinguishes his groups, assorting those of the several seasons.¶ Perhaps in the whole compass of poetry there is no such perfect combination of elegance and truth as the passage in which Perdita bestows her gifts—parts of which are of such surpassing loveliness, that the sense aches at them:—

"O, Proserpina,
For the flowers now, that, frighted, thou lett'st fall

* "Henry VI.," Part II., Act III., Scene II.
† "Henry V.," Act III., Scene V. ‡ "The Gardener's Chronicle," May 29, 1841.
§ Note on "As You Like It," Act III., Scene II. ‖ "Winter's Tale," Act IV., Scene III.
¶ Patterson's "Natural History of the Insects mentioned in Shakspeare's Plays."

From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath."*

Of all the objects of creation it is in flowers that Shakspere's genius appears most to revel and luxuriate; but the precision with which he seizes upon their characteristics distinguishes him from all other poets. A word is a description. The "pale primrose," the "azur'd harebell," are the flowers to be strewn upon Fidele's grave; but how is their beauty elevated when the one is compared to her face, and the other to her veins! Shakspere perhaps caught the sweetest image of his sweetest song from the lines of Chaucer which we have recently quoted; where we have the lark, and the fiery Phœbus drying the silver drops on the leaves. But it was impossible to have translated this fine passage, as Shakspere has done, without the minute observation of the naturalist working with the invention of the poet:—

"Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On *chalic'd flowers* that lies."†

The rosebud shrivels and dies, and the cause is disregarded by a common observer. The poetical naturalist points out "the bud bit by an envious worm."‡ Again, the microscope of the poet sees "the crimson drops i' the bottom of a cowslip," and the observation lies in the cells of his memory till it becomes a comparison of exquisite delicacy in reference to the "cinque-spotted" mark of the sleeping Imogen. But the eye which observes everything is not only an eye for beauty, as it looks upon the produce of the fields; it has the sense of utility as strong as that which exists in the calculations of the most anti-poetical. The mad Lear's garland is a catalogue of the husbandman's too luxuriant enemies:—

"Crown'd with rank fumiter, and furrow weeds,
With harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn."§

Who could have conceived the noble picture in Henry V. of a country wasted by war, but one who from his youth upward had been familiar, even to the minutest practice, with all that is achieved by cultivation, and all that is lost by neglect;—who had seen the wild powers of nature held in subjection to the same producing power under the guidance of art;—who had himself assisted in this best conquest of man?—

"Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,
Unpruned dies: her hedges even-pleach'd,
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair
Put forth disorder'd twigs: her fallow leas
The darnel, hemlock, and rank fumitory,
Doth root upon; while that the coulter rusts,
That should deracinate such savagery:
The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
The freckled cowslip, burnet, and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness; and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility."‖

* "Winter's Tale," Act IV., Scene III.
† "Cymbeline," Act II., Scene III.
‡ "Romeo and Juliet," Act I., Scene I.
§ "King Lear," Act IV., Scene IV.
‖ "Henry V.," Act V. Scene II.

Even the technical words of agriculture find their place in his language of poetry :—

"Like to the summer's corn by tempest *lodg'd*."*

He goes into the woods of his own Arden, and he associates her oaks with the sublimest imagery ; but still the oak loses nothing of its characteristics. "The thing of courage, as roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise,"

"When splitting winds
Make flexible the *knees* of knotted oaks." †

Again :—

"Merciful Heaven !
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Splitt'st the *unwedgeable* and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle." ‡

Even the woodman's economy, who is careful not to exhaust the tree that furnishes him fuel, becomes an image to show, by contrast, the impolicy of excessive taxation :—

"Why, we take
From every tree, lop, bark, and part o' the timber ;
And, though we leave it with a root, thus hack'd
The air will drink the sap." §

It is in these woods that he has studied the habits of the "joiner squirrel," who makes Mab's chariot out of an "empty hazel-nut."‖ Here the active boy was no doubt the "venturous fairy" that would seek the "squirrel's hoard, and fetch new nuts."¶ Here he has watched the stock-dove sitting upon her nest, and has stored the fact in his mind till it becomes one of the loveliest of poetical comparisons :—

"Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclos'd,
His silence will sit drooping." **

What book-fed poet could have chosen a homely incident of country life as the aptest illustration of an assembly suddenly scattered by their fears ?—

"Russet-painted choughs, many in sort,
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves, and madly sweep the sky." ††

The poet tells us—and we believe him as much as if a Pliny or a Gesner had written it—that

"The poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl." ‡‡

The boy has climbed to the kite's nest, and there perchance has found some of the gear that "maidens bleach ;" the discovery becomes a saying for Autolycus :—"When the kite builds, look to lesser linen."§§ In all this practical part of Shakspere's education it is emphatically true that the boy "is father of the man." ‖‖

* "Henry VI.," Part II., Act III., Scene I. † "Troilus and Cressida," Act I., Scene III.
‡ "Measure for Measure," Act II., Scene II. § "Henry VIII.," Act I., Scene II.
‖ "Romeo and Juliet," Act I., Scene IV. ¶ "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Act IV., Scene I.
** "Hamlet," Act V., Scene I. †† "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Act III., Scene II.
‡‡ "Macbeth," Act IV., Scene II. §§ "Winter's Tale," Act IV., Scene II.
‖‖ Wordsworth.

Shakspere, in an early play, has described his native river:—

"The current that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou know'st, being stopp'd, impatiently doth rage;
But, when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with the enamell'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
And so by many winding nooks he strays,
With willing sport, to the wild ocean." *

[Near Alveston.]

The solitary boat of the young poet may be fancied floating down this "current." There is not a sound to disturb his quiet, but the gentle murmur when "the waving sedges play with wind." † As the boat glides unsteered into some winding nook, the swan ruffles his proud crest; and the quick eye of the naturalist sees his mate deep hidden in the reeds and osiers:—

"So doth the swan her downy cygnets save,
Keeping them prisoner underneath her wings." ‡

Very lovely is this Avon for some miles above Stratford; a poet's river in its beauty and its peacefulness. It is disturbed with no sound of traffic; it holds its course unvexed by man through broad meadows and wooded acclivities, which for generations seem to have been dedicated to solitude. All the great natural features of the river must have suffered little change since the time of Shakspere. Inundations in some places may have widened the channel; osier islands may have grown up where there was once a broad stream. But we here look upon the same scenery upon which he looked, as truly as we gaze upon the same blue sky, and see its image in the same glassy water. As we unmoor our boat from the fields near Bishop's Hampton, § we look back upon the church embosomed in lofty trees. The

* "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Act II., Scene VII.
† Induction to "Taming of the Shrew."
‡ "Henry VI.," Part I., Act V., Scene III.
§ The old name for Hampton Lucy.

present church is new; but it stands upon the same spot as the ancient church: its associations are the same. We glide by Charlcote. The house has been

[Old Church of Hampton Lucy.]

enlarged; its antique features somewhat improved: but it is essentially the same as the Charlcote of Shakspere. We pass its sunny lawns, and are soon amidst the unchanging features of nature. We are between deep wooded banks. Even the deer, who swim from shore to shore where the river is wide and open, are prevented invading these quiet deeps. The old turrets rising amidst the trees alone tell us that human habitation is at hand. A little onward, and we lose all trace of that culture which is ever changing the face of nature. There is a high bank called Old Town, where perhaps men and women, with their joys and sorrows, once abided. It is colonized by rabbits. The elder-tree drops its white blossoms luxuriantly over their brown burrows. The golden cups of the yellow water-lilies lie brilliantly beneath on their green couches. The reed-sparrow and the willow-wren sing their small songs around us: a stately heron flaps his heavy wing above. The tranquillity of the place is almost solemn; and a broad cloud deepens the solemnity, by throwing for a while the whole scene into shadow. We drop down the current. Nothing can be more interesting than the constant variety which this beautiful river here exhibits. Now it passes under a high bank clothed with wood; now a hill waving with corn gently rises from the water's edge. Sometimes a flat meadow presents its grassy margin to the current which threatens to inundate it upon the slightest rise; sometimes long lines of willow or alder shut out the land, and throw

their deep shadows over the placid stream. Islands of sedge here and there render the channel unnavigable, except to the smallest boat. A willow thrusting its trunk over the stream reminds us of Ophelia:—

"There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream."*

[A Peep at Charlcote.]

A gust of wind raises the underside of the leaves to view, and we then perceive the exquisite correctness of the epithet "hoar." Hawthorns, here and there, grow upon the water's edge; and the dog-rose spots the green bank with its faint red. That deformity, the pollard-willow, is not so frequent as in most rivers; but the unlopped trees wear their feathery branches, as graceful as ostrich-plumes. The gust which sings through that long colonnade of willows is blowing up a rain-storm. The wood-pigeons, who have been feeding on the banks, wing their way homewards. The old fisherman is hurrying down the current to the shelter of his cottage. He invites us to partake that shelter. His family are busy at their trade of basket-making; and the humble roof, with its cheerful fire, is a welcome retreat out of the driving rain. It is a long as well as furious rain. We open the volume of Shakspere's own poems; and we bethink us what of these he may have composed, or partly shadowed out, wandering on this river-side, or drifting under its green banks, when his happy and genial nature instinctively shaped itself into song, as the expression of his sympathy with the beautiful world around him.

"The first heir of my invention."—This may be literally true of the "Venus and Adonis," but it does not imply that the young poet had not been a diligent cultivator of fragmentary verse long before he had attempted so sustained a composition as this most original and remarkable poem. We must carry back our minds to the published poetry of 1593, when the "Venus and Adonis" appeared, fully to understand the originality of this production. Spenser had indeed then arisen to claim the highest rank in his own proper walk. Six books of "The Faery Queen" had been

* "Hamlet," Act IV., Scene VII.

[Below Charlcote.]

published two or three years. But, rejoicing as Shakspere must have done in "The Faery Queen," in his own poems we cannot trace the slightest imitation of that wonderful performance; and it is especially remarkable how steadily he resists the temptation to imitate the archaisms which Spenser's popularity must have rendered fashionable. If we go back eight or ten years, and suppose, which we have fairly a right to do, that Shakspere was a writer of verse before he was twenty, the absence of any recent models upon which he could found a style will be almost as remarkable, in the case of his narrative compositions, as in that of his dramas. In William Webbe's "Discourse of English Poetrie," published in 1586, Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Skelton are the old poets whom he commends. His immediate predecessors, or contemporaries, are—"Master George Gascoigne, a witty gentleman, and the very chief of our late rhymers," Surrey, Vaux, Norton, Bristow, Edwards, Tusser, Churchyard, Hunnis, Heywood, Hill, the Earl of Oxford (who "may challenge to himself the title of the most excellent" among "noble lords and gentlemen in her Majesty's court, which in the rare devices of poetry have been and yet are most excellent skilful"); Phaer, Twyne, Golding, Googe, and Fleming, the translators; Whetstone, Munday. The eminence of Spenser, even before the publication of "The Faery Queen," is thus acknowledged:—"This place have I purposely reserved for one, who, if not only, yet in my judgment principally, deserveth the title of the rightest English poet that ever I read: that is, the author of 'The Shepherd's Calendar.'" George Puttenham, whose "Arte of English Poesie" was published in 1589, though probably written somewhat earlier, mentions with commendation among the later sort—"For eclogue and pastoral poesy, Sir Philip Sidney and Master Challenner, and that other gentleman who wrate the late 'Shepherd's Calendar.' For ditty and amorous ode I find Sir Walter Raleigh's vein most lofty, insolent, and

passionate. Master Edward Dyer for elegy most sweet, solemn, and of high conceit. Gascoigne for a good metre and for a plentiful vein." The expression—"that other gentleman who wrate the late 'Shepherd's Calendar'"—would fix the date of this passage of Puttenham almost immediately subsequent to the publication of Spenser's poem in 1579, the author being still unknown. Shakspere, then, had very few examples amongst his contemporaries, even of the first and most obvious excellence of the "Venus and Adonis"—"the perfect sweetness of the versification."* To continue the thought of the same critic, this power of versification was "evidently original, and not the result of an easily imitable mechanism." But at the same time, he could not have attained the perfection displayed in the "Venus and Adonis" without a long and habitual practice, which could alone have bestowed the mechanical facility. It is not difficult to trace in that poem itself portions which might have been written as the desultory exercises of a young poet, and afterwards worked up so as to be imbedded in the narrative. Such is the description of the steed; such of the hare-hunt. Upon the principle upon which we regard the Sonnets, that they are fragmentary compositions, arbitrarily strung together, there can be no difficulty in assigning several of these, and especially those which are addressed to a mistress, to that period of the poet's life of which his own recollection would naturally suggest the second stage in his "Seven Ages." "The lover sighing like furnace," would have poured himself out in juvenile conceits, such as characterize the Sonnets numbered 135, 136, 143; or in playful tokens of affection, such as the 128th, the 130th, the 145th; or in complaining stanzas, "a woeful ballad," such as the 131st and 132nd. The little poems of "The Passionate Pilgrim" which can properly be ascribed to Shakspere have the decided character of early fragments. The beautiful elegiac stanzas of "Love's Labour's Lost" have the same stamp upon them; as well as similar passages in "The Comedy of Errors." The noble scene of the death of Talbot and his son, forming the 5th, 6th, and 7th scenes of the 4th act of "Henry VI.," Part I., are so different in the structure of their versification from the other portions of the play that we may fairly regard them as forming a considerable part of some separate poem, and that perhaps not originally dramatic. "The period," says Malone, "at which Shakspeare began to write for the stage will, I fear, never be precisely ascertained."† Probably not. But, in the absence of this precise information, it is a far more reasonable theory that he was educating himself in dramatic as well as poetical composition generally at an early period of his life, when such a mind could not have existed without strong poetical aspirations, than the prevailing belief that the first publication of the "Venus and Adonis," and his production of an original drama, were nearly contemporaneous. This theory assumes that his poetical capacity was suddenly developed, very nearly in its perfection, at the mature age of twenty-eight, in the midst of the laborious occupation of an actor, who had no claim for reward amongst his fellows but as an actor. We, on the contrary, consider that we adopt not only a more reasonable view, but one which is supported by all existing evidence, external and internal, when we regard his native fields as Shakspere's poetical school. Believing that, in the necessary leisure of a country life,—encumbered as we think with no cares of wool-stapling or glove-making, neither educating youth at the charge-house like his own Holofernes, nor even collecting his knowledge of legal terms at an attorney's desk, but a free and happy agriculturist,—the young Shakspere not exactly "lisped in numbers," but cherished and cultivated the faculty when "the numbers came;" we yield ourselves up to the poetical notion, because it is at the same time the more rational and consistent

* Coleridge: "Biographia Literaria." † Posthumous "Life," p. 167.

one, that the genius of verse cherished her young favourite on these "willow'd banks :"—

"Here, as with honey gather'd from the rock,
She fed the little prattler, and with songs
Oft sooth'd his wondering ears; with deep delight
On her soft lap he sat, and caught the sounds." *

* Joseph Warton.

[Near Alveston.]

[Hampton Lucy: Old Church.]

CHAPTER X.

THE TROTHPLIGHT AND THE WEDDING.

THE hospitality of our ancestors was founded upon their sympathies with each other's joys and sorrows. The festivals of the church, the celebrations of sheep-shearing and harvest-home, the Mayings, were occasions of general gladness. But upon the marriage of a son or of a daughter, at the christening of a child, the humblest assembled their neighbours to partake of their particular rejoicing. So was it also with their sorrows. Death visited a family, and its neighbours came to mourn. To be absent from the house of mourning would have seemed as if there were not a fellowship in sorrow as well as in joy. Christian neighbours in those times looked upon each other as members of the same family. Their intimacy was

much more constant and complete than in days that are thought more refined. Privacy was not looked upon as a desirable thing. The latch of every door was lifted without knocking, and the dance in the hall was arranged the instant some young taborer struck a note ; or the gossip's bowl was passed around the winter fire-side, to jest and song :—

> "And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe,
> And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
> A merrier hour was never wasted there." *

Young men married early. In the middle ranks there was little outfit required to begin housekeeping. A few articles of useful furniture satisfied their simple tastes ; and we doubt not there was as much happiness seated on the wooden bench as now on the silken ottoman, and as light hearts tripped over the green rushes as over the Persian carpet. A silver bowl or two, a few spoons, constituted the display of the more ambitious ; but for use the treen platter was at once clean and substantial, though the pewter dish sometimes graced a solemn merry-making. Employment, especially agricultural, was easily obtained by the industrious ; and the sons of the yeomen, whose ambition did not drive them into the towns to pursue commerce, or to the universities to try for the prizes of professions, walked humbly and contentedly in the same road as their fathers had walked before them. They tilled a little land with indifferent skill, and their herds and flocks gave food and raiment to their household. Surrounded by the cordial intimacies of the class to which he belonged, it is not difficult to understand how William Shakspere married early ; and the very circumstance of his so marrying is tolerably clear evidence of the course of life in which he was brought up.

Shakspere's marriage-bond, which was discovered a few years since, has set at rest all doubt as to the name and residence of his wife. She is there described as Anne Hathaway, of Stratford, in the diocese of Worcester, maiden. Rowe, in his "Life," says,—"Upon his leaving school, he seems to have given entirely into that way of living which his father proposed to him ; and in order to settle in the world, after a family manner, he thought fit to marry while he was yet very young. His wife was the daughter of one Hathaway, said to have been a substantial yeoman in the neighbourhood of Stratford." At the hamlet of Shottery, which is in the parish of Stratford, the Hathaways had been settled forty years before the period of Shakspere's marriage ; for in the Warwickshire Surveys, in the time of Philip and Mary, it is recited that John Hathaway held property at Shottery, by copy of Court-roll, dated 20th of April, 34th of Henry VIII., (1545).† The Hathaway of Shakspere's time was named Richard ; and the intimacy between him and John Shakspere is shown by a precept in an action against Richard Hathaway, dated 1566, in which John Shakspere is his bondman. Before the discovery of the marriage-bond, Malone had found a confirmation of the traditional account that the maiden name of Shakspere's wife was Hathaway ; for Lady Barnard, the grand-daughter of Shakspere, makes bequests in her will to the children of Thomas Hathaway, "her kinsman." But Malone doubts whether there were not other Hathaways than those of Shottery, residents in the town of Stratford, and not in the hamlet included in the parish. This is possible. But, on the other hand, the description in the marriage-bond of Anne Hathaway, as of Stratford, is no proof that she was not of Shottery ; for such a document would necessarily have regard only to the parish of the persons described.

* "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Act II., Scene I.

† The Shottery property, which was called Hewland, remained with the descendants of the Hathaways till 1838. Amongst the laudable objects of the Shakspere Club of Stratford was the purchase and preservation of this property. That has been abandoned for want of means.

Tradition, always valuable when it is not opposed to evidence, has associated for many years the cottage of the Hathaways at Shottery with the wife of Shakspere. Garrick purchased relics out of it at the time of the Stratford Jubilee; Samuel Ireland afterwards carried off what was called Shakspere's courting-chair; and there is still in the house a very ancient carved bedstead, which has been handed down from descendant to descendant as an heirloom. The house was no doubt once adequate to form a comfortable residence for a substantial and even wealthy yeoman. It is still a pretty cottage, embosomed by trees, and surrounded by pleasant pastures; and here the young poet might have surrendered his prudence to his affections:—

"As in the sweetest buds
The eating canker dwells, so eating love
Inhabits in the finest wits of all."*

[Shottery Cottage.]

The very early marriage of the young man, with one more than seven years his elder, has been supposed to have been a rash and passionate proceeding. Upon the face of it, it appears an act that might at least be reproved in the words which follow those we have just quoted:—

"As the most forward bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow,
Even so by love the young and tender wit
Is turn'd to folly; blasting in the bud,
Losing his verdure even in the prime,
And all the fair effects of future hopes."

This is the common consequence of precocious marriages; but we are not therefore to conclude that "the young and tender wit" of our Shakspere was "turned to folly"—that his "forward bud" was "eaten by the canker"—that "his verdure"

* "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Act I., Scene I.

was lost "even in the prime," by his marriage with Anne Hathaway before he was nineteen. The influence which this marriage must have had upon his destinies was no doubt considerable; but it is too much to assume, as it has been assumed, that it was an unhappy influence. All that we *really* know of Shakspere's family life warrants the contrary supposition. We believe, to go no farther at present, that the marriage of Shakspere was one of affection; that there was no disparity in the worldly condition of himself and the object of his choice; that it was with the consent of friends; that there were no circumstances connected with it which indicate that it was either forced or clandestine, or urged on by an artful woman to cover her apprehended loss of character.

There is every reason to believe that Shakspere was remarkable for manly beauty:—"He was a handsome well-shaped man," says Aubrey. According to tradition, he played Adam in "As You Like It," and the Ghost in "Hamlet." Adam says,—

"Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty."

Upon his personation of the Ghost, Mr. Campbell has the following judicious remarks:—"It has been alleged, in proof of his mediocrity, that he enacted the part of his own Ghost, in 'Hamlet.' But is the Ghost in 'Hamlet' a very mean character? No: though its movements are few, they must be awfully graceful; and the spectral voice, though subdued and half-monotonous, must be solemn and full of feeling. It gives us an imposing idea of Shakspeare's stature and mien to conceive him in this part. The English public, accustomed to see their lofty nobles, their Essexes, and their Raleighs, clad in complete armour, and moving under it with a majestic air, would not have tolerated the actor Shakspeare, unless he had presented an appearance worthy of the buried majesty of Denmark."* That he performed *kingly* parts is indicated by these lines, written, in 1611, by John Davies, in a poem inscribed "To our English Terence, Mr. William Shakespeare:"—

"Some say, good Will, which I in sport do sing,
Hadst thou not play'd some *kingly parts* in sport,
Thou hadst been a companion for a king,
And been a king among the meaner sort."

The portrait by Martin Droeshout, prefixed to the edition of 1623, when Shakspere would be well remembered by his friends, gives a notion of a man of remarkably fine features, independent of the wonderful development of forehead. The lines accompanying it, which bear the signature B. I. (most likely Ben Jonson), attest the accuracy of the likeness. The bust at Stratford bears the same character. The sculptor was Gerard Johnson. It was probably erected soon after the poet's death; for it is mentioned by Leonard Digges, in his verses upon the publication of Shakspere's collected works by his "pious fellows." All the circumstances of which we have any knowledge imply that Shakspere, at the time of his marriage, was such a person as might well have won the heart of a mistress whom tradition has described as eminently beautiful. Anne Hathaway at this time was of mature beauty. The inscription over her grave in the church of Stratford-upon-Avon states that she died on "the 6th day of August, 1623, being of the age of 67 years." In November 1582, therefore, she would be of the age of twenty-six. This disparity of years between Shakspere and his wife has been, we think, somewhat too much dwelt upon. Malone holds that "such a disproportion of age seldom fails at a subsequent period of life to be productive of unhappiness." Malone had, no doubt, in his mind the belief that Shakspere left his wife wholly dependent upon her children,—a belief of

* Remarks prefixed to Moxon's edition of the Dramatic Works.

which we had the satisfaction of showing the utter groundlessness. He suggests that in the "Midsummer-Night's Dream" this disproportion is alluded to, and he quotes a speech of Lysander in Act I. Scene I., of that play, not however giving the comment of Hermia upon it. The lines in the original stand thus:—

> "*Lys.* Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth:
> But either it was different in blood;—
> *Her.* O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low!
> *Lys.* Or else *misgraffed, in respect of years;*—
> *Her.* O spite! too old to be engag'd to young!
> *Lys.* Or else it stood upon the choice of friends;—
> *Her.* O hell! to choose love by another's eye;
> *Lys.* Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it."

Difference in blood, disparity of years, the choosing of friends, are opposed to sympathy in choice. But was Shakspere's own case such as he would bear in mind in making Hermia exclaim, "O spite! *too old* to be engag'd to *young?*" The passage was in all probability written about ten years after his marriage, when his wife would still be in the prime of womanhood. When Mr. de Quincey, therefore, connects the saying of Parson Evans with Shakspere's early love,—"I like not when a woman has a great peard,"—he scarcely does justice to his own powers of observation and his book-experience. The history of the most imaginative minds, probably of most men of great ability, would show that in the first loves, and in the early marriages, of this class, the choice has generally fallen upon women older than themselves, and this without any reference to interested motives. But Mr. de Quincey holds that Shakspere, "looking back on this part of his youthful history from his maturest years, breathes forth pathetic counsels against the errors into which his own inexperience had been ensnared. The disparity of years between himself and his wife he notices in a beautiful scene of the 'Twelfth Night.'"* In this scene Viola, disguised as a page, a very boy, one of whom it is said—

> "For they shall yet belie thy happy years
> That say thou art a man,"—

is pressed by the Duke to own that his eye "hath stay'd upon some favour." Viola, who is enamoured of the Duke, punningly replies,—"A little, by your favour;" and being still pressed to describe the "kind of woman," she says of the Duke's "complexion" and the Duke's "years." Any one who in the stage representation of the Duke should do otherwise than make him a grave man of thirty-five or forty, a staid and dignified man, would not present Shakspere's whole conception of the character. There would be a difference of twenty years between him and Viola. No wonder, then, that the poet should make the Duke dramatically exclaim,—

> "*Too old, by Heaven!* Let still the woman take
> An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
> So sways she level in her husband's heart."

And wherefore?—

> "For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
> Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
> More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
> Than women's are."

* Life of Shakspeare in the "Encyclopædia Britannica."

The pathetic counsels, therefore, which Shakspere is here supposed to breathe in his maturer years, have reference only to his own giddy and unfirm fancies. We are of opinion, with regard to this matter, that upon the general principle upon which Shakspere subjects his conception of what is individually true to what is universally true, he would have rejected instead of adopted whatever was peculiar in his own experience, if it had been emphatically recommended to his adoption through the medium of his self-consciousness. Shakspere wrote these lines at a time of life (about 1602) when a slight disparity of years between himself and his wife would have been a very poor apology to his own conscience that his affection could not hold the bent; and it certainly does happen, as a singular contradiction to his supposed "earnestness in pressing the point as to the *inverted* disparity of years, which indicates pretty clearly an appeal to the lessons of his personal experience,"* that at this precise period he should have retired from his constant attendance upon the stage, purchasing land in his native place, and thus seeking in all probability the more constant companionship of that object of his early choice of whom he is thus supposed to have expressed his distaste. It appears to us that this is a tolerably convincing proof that his affections could hold the bent, however he might dramatically and poetically have said,

> "Then let thy love be younger than thyself,
> Or thy affection cannot hold the bent:
> For women are as roses; whose fair flower,
> Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour."

There can be little doubt that the ancient ceremony of betrothing had not fallen into disuse at the period of Shakspere's marriage. Shakspere himself, who always, upon his great principle of presenting his audiences with matters familiar to them, introduces the manners of his own country in his own times, has several remarkable passages upon the subject of the troth-plight. In "Measure for Measure" we learn that the misery of the "poor dejected Mariana" was caused by a violation of the trothplight:—

> "*Duke.* She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wracked at sea, having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark, how heavily this befel to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo.
>
> *Isabella.* Can this be so? Did Angelo so leave her?
>
> *Duke.* Left her in tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort; swallowed his vows whole, pretending, in her, discoveries of dishonour; in few, bestowed her on her own lamentation, which she yet wears for his sake; and he, a marble to her tears, is washed with them, but relents not."

Angelo and Mariana were bound then "by oath;" the nuptial was appointed; there was a prescribed time between the contract and the performance of the solemnity of the Church. But, the lady having lost her dowry, the contract was violated by her "combinate" or affianced husband. The oath which Angelo violated was taken before witnesses; was probably tendered by a minister of the Church. In "Twelfth Night" we have a minute description of such a ceremonial. When Olivia is hastily espoused to Sebastian, she says,—

> "Now go with me, and with this holy man,
> Into the chantry by: there, before him,

* Life in "Encyclopædia Britannica."

And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith;
That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace: He shall conceal it
Whiles you are willing it shall come to note,
What time we will our celebration keep
According to my birth."

This was a private ceremony before a single witness, who would conceal it till the proper period of the public ceremonial. Olivia, fancying she has thus espoused the page, repeatedly calls him "husband;" and, being rejected, she summons the priest to declare

"What thou dost know
Hath newly pass'd between this youth and me."

The priest answers,—

"A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirm'd by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthen'd by interchangement of your rings;
And all the ceremony of this compact
Seal'd in my function, by my testimony:
Since when, my watch has told me, toward my grave
I have travell'd but two hours."

But from another passage in Shakspere, it is evident that the trothplight was exchanged without the presence of a priest, but that witnesses were essential to the ceremony.* The scene in the "Winter's Tale" where this occurs, is altogether so perfect a picture of rustic life, that we may fairly assume that Shakspere had in view the scenes with which his own youth was familiar, where there was mirth without grossness, and simplicity without ignorance:—

"*Flo.* O, hear me breathe my life
Before this ancient sir, who, it should seem,
Hath sometime lov'd: *I take thy hand;* this hand,
As soft as dove's down, and as white as it;
Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fann'd snow,
That 's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er.
Pol. What follows this?—
How prettily the young swain seems to wash
The hand was fair before!—I have put you out:—
But to your protestation; let me hear
What you profess.
Flo. Do, and *be witness to't.*
Pol. And this *my neighbour too?*
Flo. And he, and more
Than he, and men; the earth, the heavens, and all:
That, were I crown'd the most imperial monarch,
Thereof most worthy; were I the fairest youth
That ever made eye swerve; had force, and knowledge,
More than was ever man's, I would not prize them,
Without her love: for her, employ them all;
Commend them, and condemn them, to her service,
Or to their own perdition.
Pol. Fairly offer'd.
Com. This shows a sound affection.

* Holinshed states that at a synod held at Westminster, in the reign of Henry I., it was decreed "that contracts made between man and woman, without witnesses, concerning marriage, should be void if either of them denied it."

Shep. But, my daughter,
Say you the like to him?
Per. I cannot speak
So well, nothing so well; no, nor mean better:
By the pattern of mine own thoughts I cut out
The purity of his.
Shep. *Take hands, a bargain;—*
And friends unknown, *you shall bear witness to 't:*
I give my daughter to him, and will make
Her portion equal his.
Flo. O, that must be
I' the virtue of your daughter: one being dead,
I shall have more than you can dream of yet;
Enough then for your wonder: But, come on,
Contract us 'fore these witnesses.
Shep. *Come, your hand;*
And daughter, yours."

To the argument of Polixenes that the father of Florizel ought to know of his proceeding, the young man answers,—

"*Flo.* Come, come, he must not:—
Mark our contract."

And then the father, discovering himself, exclaims,—

"Mark your *divorce*, young sir."

Here, then, in the publicity of a village festival, the hand of the loved one is solemnly taken by her "servant;" he breathes his life before the ancient stranger who is accidentally present. The stranger is called to be witness to the protestation; and so is the neighbour who has come with him. The maiden is called upon by her father to speak, and then the old man adds,—

"Take hands, a bargain."

The friends are to bear witness to it:—

"I give my daughter to him, and will make
Her portion equal his."

The impatient lover then again exclaims,—

"Contract us 'fore these witnesses."

The shepherd takes the hands of the youth and the maiden. Again the lover exclaims,—

"Mark our contract."

The ceremony is left incomplete, for the princely father discovers himself with,—

"Mark your divorce, young sir."

We have thus shown, by implication, that in the time of Shakspere betrothment was not an obsolete rite. Previous to the Reformation it was in all probability that civil contract derived from the Roman law, which was confirmed indeed by the sacrament of marriage, but which usually preceded it for a definite period,—some say forty days,—having perhaps too frequently the effect of the marriage of the Church as regarded the unrestrained intercourse of those so espoused. In a work published in 1543, "The Christian State of Matrimony," we find this passage: "Yet in this thing also must I warn every reasonable and honest person to beware that in the contracting of marriage they dissemble not, nor set forth any lie. Every man

likewise must esteem the person to whom he is handfasted none otherwise than for his own spouse; though as yet it be not done in the church, nor in the street. After the handfasting and making of the contract the church-going and wedding should not be deferred too long." The author then goes on to rebuke a custom, "that at the handfasting there is made a great feast and superfluous banquet;" and he adds words which imply that the Epithalamium was at this feast sung, without a doubt of its propriety, "certain weeks afore they go to the church," where

> "All sanctimonious ceremonies may
> With full and holy rite be minister'd."

The passage in "The Tempest" from which we quote these lines has been held to show that Shakspere denounced, with peculiar solemnity, that impatience which waited not for "all sanctimonious ceremonies."* But it must be remembered that the solitary position of Ferdinand and Miranda prevented even the solemnity of a betrothment; there could be no witnesses of the public contract; it would be of the nature of those privy contracts which the ministers of religion, early in the reign of Elizabeth, were commanded to exhort young people to abstain from. The proper exercise of that authority during half a century had not only repressed these privy contracts, but had confined the ancient practice of espousals, with their almost inevitable freedoms, to persons in the lower ranks of life, who might be somewhat indifferent to opinion. A learned writer on the Common Prayer, Sparrow, holds that the Marriage Service of the Church of England was both a betrothment and a marriage. It united the two forms. At the commencement of the service the man says, "I plight thee my troth;" and the woman, "I give thee my troth." This form approaches as nearly as possible to that of a civil contract; but then comes the religious sanction to the obligation,—the sacrament of matrimony. In the form of espousals so minutely recited by the priest in "Twelfth Night," he is only present to seal the compact by his "testimony." The marriage customs of Shakspere's youth and the opinions regarding them might be very different from the practice and opinions of thirty years later, when he wrote "The Tempest." But in no case does he attempt to show, even through his lovers themselves, that the public trothplight was other than a preliminary to a more solemn and binding ceremonial, however it might approach to the character of a marriage. It is remarkable that Webster, on the contrary, who was one of Shakspere's later contemporaries, has made the heroine of one of his noblest tragedies, "The Duchess of Malfi," in the warmth of her affection for her steward, exclaim—

> "I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber
> *Per verba præsenti* is absolute marriage."

This is an allusion to the distinctions of the canon law between betrothing and marrying—the betrothment being espousals with the *verba de futuro;* the marriage, espousals with the *verba de præsenti.* The Duchess of Malfi had misinterpreted the lawyers when she believed that a secret "contract in a chamber" was "absolute marriage," whether the engagement was for the present or the future.

It is scarcely necessary to point out to our readers that the view we have taken presupposes that the licence for matrimony, obtained from the Consistorial Court at Worcester, was a permission sought for under no extraordinary circumstances;—still less that the young man who was about to marry was compelled to urge on the marriage as a consequence of previous imprudence. We believe, on the contrary, that the course pursued was strictly in accordance with the customs of the time, and

* Life of Shakspeare by Mr. de Quincey, in the "Encyclopædia Britannica."

of the class to which Shakspere belonged. The espousals before witnesses, we have no doubt, were then considered as constituting a valid marriage, if followed up within a limited time by the marriage of the Church. However the Reformed Church might have endeavoured to abrogate this practice, it was unquestionably the ancient habit of the people. It was derived from the Roman law, the foundation of many of our institutions. It prevailed for a long period without offence. It still prevails in the Lutheran Church. We are not to judge of the customs of those days by our own, especially if our inferences have the effect of imputing criminality where the most perfect innocence existed. Because Shakspere's marriage-bond is dated in November, 1582, and his daughter is born in May, 1583, we are not to believe that here was "haste and secrecy." Mr. Halliwell has brought sound documentary evidence to bear upon this question; he has shewn that the two bondsmen, Sandels and Richardson, were respectable neighbours of the Hathaways of Shottery, although, like Anne herself, they are described as of Stratford. This disposes of the "secrecy." In the same year that Shakspere was married, Mr. Halliwell has shewn that there were two entries in the Stratford Register, recording the church rite of marriage to have preceded the baptism of a child, by shorter periods than indicated by Shakspere's marriage-bond; and that in cases where the sacredness of the marriage has been kept out of view, illegitimacy is invariably noted in these registers. The "haste" was evidently not required in fear of the scandal of Stratford. We believe that the course pursued was strictly in accordance with the custom of the time, and of the class to which the Shaksperes and Hathaways belonged.

[House in Charlcote Village.]

The bells of some village church near Stratford are ringing for a wedding, in the last days of November, 1582. The out-door ceremonials are not quite so rude as those which Ben Jonson has delineated; but they are founded on the same primitive

customs. There are "ribands, rosemary, and bay for the bridemen;" and some one of the rustics may exclaim—

> "Look! and the wenches ha' not found 'un out,
> And do parzent un' with a van of rosemary,
> And bays, to vill a bow-pot, trim the head
> Of my best vore horse! we shall all ha' bride laces,
> Or points I zee."*

Like the father in Jonson's play, the yeoman of Shottery might say to his dame—

> "You 'd have your daughters and maids
> Dance o'er the fields like fays to church:"

but he will not add—

> "I 'll have no roundels."

He will not be reproached that he resolved

> "To let no music go afore his child
> To church, to cheer her heart up."†

On the other hand, there are no court ceremonials here to be seen,

> "As running at the ring, plays, masks, and tilting."‡

There would be the bride-cup and the wheaten garlands; the bride led by fair-haired boys, and the bridegroom following with his chosen neighbours:—

> "Glide by the banks of virgins then, and pass
> The showers of roses, lucky four-leav'd grass;
> The while the cloud of younglings sing,
> And drown ye with a flow'ry spring;
> While some repeat
> Your praise, and bless you, sprinkling you with wheat,
> While that others do divine
> 'Blest is the bride on whom the sun doth shine.'"§

The procession enters the body of the church; for, after the Reformation, the knot was no longer tied, as, at the five weddings of the Wife of Bath, at "church-door." The blessing is pronounced, the bride-cup is called for: the accustomed kiss is given to the bride. But neither custom is performed after the fashion of Petrucio:—

> "He calls for wine:—'A health,' quoth he; as if
> He had been aboard, carousing to his mates
> After a storm:—quaff'd off the muscadel,
> And threw the sops all in the sexton's face;
> Having no other reason,—
> But that his beard grew thin and hungerly,
> And seem'd to ask him sops as he was drinking.
> This done, he took the bride about the neck,
> And kiss'd her lips with such a clamourous smack,
> That, at the parting, all the church did echo."‖

* "Tale of a Tub," Act I., Scene II. † "Tale of a Tub," Act II., Scene I.
‡ "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," Act IV., Scene III. § Herrick's "Hesperides."
‖ "Taming of the Shrew," Act III., Scene II.

They drink out of the bride-cup with as much earnestness (however less the formality) as the great folks at the marriage of the Elector Palatine to the daughter of James I. :—"In conclusion, a joy pronounced by the King and Queen, and seconded with congratulation of the lords there present, which crowned with draughts of Ippocras out of a great golden bowl, as an health to the prosperity of the marriage, began by the Prince Palatine, and answered by the Princess." *

We will not think that "when they come home from church then beginneth excess of eating and drinking; and as much is wasted in one day as were sufficient for the two new-married folk half a year to live upon." † The Dance follows the banquet:

"Hark! hark! I hear the minstrels play." ‡

* Quoted in Reed's "Shakspeare," from Finet's "Philoxenis."
† "Christian State of Matrimony." ‡ "Taming of the Shrew," Act III., Scene II.

BOOK III

[Clifford Church.]

CHAPTER I.

LEAVING HOME.

"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess about eighteen, and was an actor at one of the playhouses, and did act exceedingly well. Now Ben Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor. He began early to make Essays at Dramatic Poetry, which at that time was very low, and his plays took well." So writes honest Aubrey, in the year 1680, in his "Minutes of Lives" addressed to his "worthy friend, Mr. Anthony à Wood, Antiquary of Oxford." Of the value of Aubrey's evidence we may form some opinion from his own statement to his friend:—"'T is a task that I never thought to have undertaken till you imposed it upon me, saying that I was fit for it by reason of my general acquaintance, having now not only lived above half a century of years in the world, but have also been much tumbled up and down in it; which hath made me so well known. Besides the modern advantage of coffee-houses in this great city, before which men knew not how to be acquainted but with their own relations or societies, I might add that I come of a longævous race, by which means I have wiped

some feathers off the wings of time for several generations, which does reach high."* It must not be forgotten that Aubrey's account of Shakspere, brief and imperfect as it is, is the earliest known to exist. Rowe's "Life" was not published till 1707; and although he states that he must own a particular obligation to Betterton, the actor, for the most considerable part of the passages relating to this life—"his veneration for the memory of Shakspeare having engaged him to make a journey into Warwickshire on purpose to gather up what remains he could of a name for which he had so great a veneration"—we have no assistance in fixing the date of Betterton's inquiries. Betterton was born in 1635. From the Restoration until his retirement from the stage, about 1700, he was the most deservedly popular actor of his time; "such an actor," says "The Tatler," "as ought to be recorded with the same respect as Roscius among the Romans." He died in 1710; and looking at his busy life, it is probable that he did not make this journey into Warwickshire until after his retirement from the theatre. Had he set about these inquiries earlier, there can be little doubt that the "Life" by Rowe would have contained more precise and satisfactory information. Shakspere's sister was alive in 1646; his eldest daughter, Mrs. Hall, in 1649; his second daughter, Mrs. Quiney, in 1662; and his grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, in 1670. The information which might be collected in Warwickshire, after the death of Shakspere's lineal descendants, would necessarily be mixed up with traditions, having for the most part some foundation, but coloured and distorted by that general love of the marvellous which too often hides the fact itself in the inference from it. Thus, Shakspere's father might have sold his own meat, as the landowners of his time are reproached by Harrison for doing, and yet in no proper sense of the word have been a butcher. Thus, the supposition that the poet had intended to satirize the Lucy family, in an allusion to their arms, might have suggested that there was a grudge between him and the knight; and what so likely a subject of dispute as the killing of venison? The tradition might have been exact as to the dispute; but the laws of another century could alone have suggested that the quarrel would compel the poet to fly the country. Aubrey's story of Shakspere's coming to London is a simple and natural one, without a single marvellous circumstance about it:—"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London." This, the elder story, appears to us to have much greater verisimilitude than the later:—"He was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time, and shelter himself in London." Aubrey, who has picked up all the gossip "of coffee-houses in this great city," hears no word of Rowe's story, which would certainly have been handed down amongst the traditions of the theatre to Davenant and Shadwell, from whom he does hear something:—"I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell (who is counted the best comedian we have now) say, that he had a most prodigious wit." Neither does he say, nor indeed any one else till two centuries and a quarter after Shakspere is dead, that, "after four years' conjugal discord, he would resolve upon that plan of solitary emigration to the metropolis, which, at the same time that released him from the humiliation of domestic feuds, succeeded so splendidly for his worldly prosperity, and with a train of circumstances so vast for all future ages."† It is certainly a singular vocation for a writer of genius to bury the legendary scandals of the days of Rowe, for the sake of exhuming a new scandal, which cannot be received at all without the belief that the circumstance must have had a permanent and most evil influence upon the mind of the unhappy man who thus cowardly and ignominiously is held to have severed himself from his duty as a husband and a father. We cannot trace the evil influence, and therefore we reject

* This letter, which accompanies the "Lives," is dated London, June 15, 1680.

† "Encyclopædia Britannica."

May 26 Susanna daughter to William Shakspere

February 2. Hamnet & Judeth sonne & daughter to Willia Shakspere

the scandal. It has not even the slightest support from the weakest tradition. It is founded upon an imperfect comparison of two documents, judging of the habits of that period by those of our own day; supported by quotations from a dramatist of whom it would be difficult to affirm that he ever wrote a line which had strict reference to his own feelings and circumstances, and whose intellect in his dramas went so completely out of itself that it almost realizes the description of the soul in its first and pure nature—that it "hath no idiosyncrasies; that is, hath no proper natural inclinations which are not competent to others of the same kind and condition."*

In the baptismal register of the parish of Stratford for the year 1583 is the entry of the birth of Susanna. This record necessarily implies the residence of the wife of William Shakspere in the parish of Stratford. Did he himself continue to reside in this parish? There is no evidence of his residence. His name appears in no suit in the Bailiff's Court at this period. He fills no municipal office such as his father had filled before him. But his wife continues to reside in the native place of her husband, surrounded by his relations and her own. His father and his mother no doubt watch with anxious solicitude over the fortunes of their first son. He has a brother Gilbert, seventeen years of age, and a sister of fourteen. His brother Richard is nine years of age; but Edmund is young enough to be the playmate of his little Susanna. In 1585 there is another entry in the parochial register, the birth of a son and a daughter.

William Shakspere has now nearly attained his majority. While he is yet a minor he is the father of three children. The circumstance of his minority may perhaps account for the absence of his name from all records of court-leet, or bailiff's court, or common-hall. He was neither a constable, nor an ale-conner, nor an overseer, nor a jury-man, because he was a minor. We cannot affirm that he did not leave Stratford before his minority expired; but it is to be inferred, that, if he had continued to reside at Stratford after he was legally of age, we should have found traces of his residence in the records of the town. If his residence were out of the borough, as we have supposed his father's to have been at this period, some trace would yet have been found of him, in all likelihood, within the parish. Just before the termination of his minority we have an undeniable record that he was a second time a father within the parish. It is at this period, then, that we would place his removal from Stratford; his flight, according to the old legend; his solitary emigration, his unamiable separation from his family, according to the new discovery. That his emigration was even solitary we have not a tittle of evidence. The one fact we know with reference to Shakspere's domestic arrangements in London is this: that as early as 1596 he was the occupier of a house in Southwark. "From a

* "Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages concerning the Præ-existence of Souls." By the Rev. Joseph Glanvil.

paper now before me, which formerly belonged to Edward Alleyn, the player, our poet appears to have lived in Southwark, near the Bear-garden, in 1596." * Malone does not describe this paper; but Mr. Collier found it at Dulwich College, and it thence appears that the name of "Mr. Shaksper" was in a list of "Inhabitants of Sowtherk as have complaned, this — of Jully, 1596." It is immaterial to know of what Shakspere complained, in company with "Wilson the piper," and sundry others. The neighbourhood does not seem to have been a very select one, if we may judge from another name in this list. We cannot affirm that Shakspere was the solitary occupier of this house in Southwark. Chalmers says, "it can admit of neither controversy nor doubt, that Shakspere in very early life settled in a family way where he was bred. Where he thus settled, he probably resolved that his wife and family should remain through life; although he himself made frequent excursions to London, the scene of his profit, and the theatre of his fame." Mr. Hunter has discovered a document which shews that "William Shakespeare was, in 1598, assessed in a large sum to a subsidy upon the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopgate. He was assessed, also, in the Liberty of the Clink, Southwark, in 1609; but whether for a dwelling-house, or for his property in the Globe, is not evident. His occupation as an actor both at the Blackfriars and the Globe, the one a winter, the other a summer theatre, continued till 1603 or 1604. His interest as a proprietor of both theatres existed in all probability till 1612. In 1597 Shakspere became the purchaser of the largest house in Stratford, and he resided there with his family till the time of his death in 1616. Many circumstances show that his interests and affections were always connected with the place of his birth.

William Shakspere, "being inclined naturally to poetry and acting," naturally became a poet and an actor. He would become a poet, without any impelling circumstances not necessarily arising out of his own condition. "He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low." Aubrey's account of his early poetical efforts is an intelligible and consistent account. Shakspere was familiar with the existing state of dramatic poetry, through his acquaintance with the stage in the visits of various companies of actors to Stratford. In 1584, there had been three sets of players at Stratford, remunerated for their performances out of the public purse of the borough. These were the players of "my Lord of Oxford," the Earl of Warwick, and the Earl of Essex. In 1585 we have no record of players in the borough. In 1586 there is only one performance paid for by the Corporation. But in 1587 the Queen's players, for the first time, make their appearance in that town; and their performances are rewarded at a much higher rate than those of any previous company. Two years after this, that is in 1589, we have undeniable evidence that Shakspere had not only a casual engagement, was not only a salaried servant, as many players were, but was a shareholder in this very Queen's company, with other shareholders below him in the list. The fair inference is, that he did not at once jump into his position. Rowe says that, after having settled in the world in a family manner, and continued in this kind of settlement for some time, the extravagance of which he was guilty in robbing Sir Thomas Lucy's park obliged him to leave his business and family. He could not have so left, even according to the circumstances which were known to Rowe, till after the birth of his son and daughter in 1585. But the story goes on:—"It is at this time, and upon this accident, that he is said to have made his first acquaintance in the playhouse. He was received into the company then in being, at first in a very mean rank; but his admirable wit, and the natural turn of it to the stage, soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary actor, yet as an excellent

* Malone: "Inquiry," &c., p. 215.

writer." Sixty years after the time of Rowe the story assumed a more circumstantial shape, as far as regards the *mean rank* which Shakspere filled in his early connexion with the theatre. Dr Johnson adds one passage to the "Life," which he says "Mr. Pope related, as communicated to him by Mr. Rowe." It is so remarkable an anecdote that it is somewhat surprising that Rowe did not himself add it to his own meagre account:—

"In the time of Elizabeth, coaches being yet uncommon, and hired coaches not at all in use, those who were too proud, too tender, or too idle to walk, went on horseback to any distant business or diversion. Many came on horseback to the play; and when Shakspeare fled to London from the terror of a criminal prosecution, his first expedient was to wait at the door of the playhouse, and hold the horses of those that had no servants, that they might be ready again after the performance. In this office he became so conspicuous for his care and readiness, that in a short time every man as he alighted called for Will Shakspeare, and scarcely any other waiter was trusted with a horse while Will Shakspeare could be had. This was the first dawn of better fortune. Shakspeare, finding more horses put into his hand than he could hold, hired boys to wait under his inspection, who, when Will Shakspeare was summoned, were immediately to present themselves.—'I am Shakspeare's boy, Sir.' In time, Shakspeare found higher employment; but as long as the practice of riding to the playhouse continued, the waiters that held the horses retained the appellation of Shakspeare's boys."

Steevens has attempted to impugn the credibility of this anecdote by saying,—"That it was once the general custom to ride on horseback to the play I am yet to learn. The most popular of the theatres were on the Bankside; and we are told by the satirical pamphleteers of that time that the usual mode of conveyance to these places of amusement was by water, but not a single writer so much as hints at the custom of riding to them, or at the practice of having horses held during the hours of exhibition." Steevens is here in error; he has a vague notion—which is still persevered in with singular obstinacy, even by those who have now the means of knowing that Shakspere had acquired property in the chief theatre in 1589—that the great dramatic poet had felt no inspiration till he was about eight-and-twenty, and that, therefore, his connexion with the theatre began in the palmy days of the Globe on the Bankside—a theatre not built till 1593. To the earlier theatres, if they were frequented by the gallants of the Court, they would have gone on horses. They did so go, as we learn from Dekker, long after the Bankside theatres were established. The story first appeared in a book entitled "The Lives of the Poets," considered to be the work of Theophilus Cibber, but said to be written by a Scotchman of the name of Shiels, who was an amanuensis of Dr. Johnson. Shiels had certainly some hand in the book; and there we find that Davenant told the anecdote to Betterton, who communicated it to Rowe, who told it to Pope, who told it to Dr. Newton. Improbable as the story is as it now stands, there may be a scintillation of truth in it, as in most traditions. It is by no means impossible that the Blackfriars Theatre might have had Shakspere's boys to hold horses, but not Shakspere himself. As a proprietor of the theatre, Shakspere might sagaciously perceive that its interest would be promoted by the readiest accommodation being offered to its visitors; and further, with that worldly adroitness which, in him, was not incompatible with the exercise of the highest genius, he might have derived an individual profit by employing servants to perform this office. In an age when horse-stealing was one of the commonest occurrences, it would be a guarantee for the safe charge of the horses that they were committed to the care of the agents of one then well known in the world,—an actor, a writer, a proprietor of the theatre. Such an association with the author of Hamlet must sound most anti-poetical; but the fact

is scarcely less prosaic that the same wondrous man, about the period when he wrote Macbeth, had an action for debt in the Bailiff's Court at Stratford, to recover thirty-five shillings and tenpence for corn by him sold and delivered.

Familiar, then, with theatrical exhibitions, such as they were, from his earliest youth, and with a genius so essentially dramatic that all other writers that the world has seen have never approached him in his power of going out of himself, it is inconsistent with probability that he should not have attempted some dramatic composition at an early age. The theory that he was first employed in repairing the plays of others we hold to be altogether untenable; supported only by a very narrow view of the great essentials to a dramatic work, and by verbal criticism, which, when carefully examined, utterly fails even in its own petty assumptions. There can be no doubt that the three Parts of "Henry VI." belong to the early stage. We believe them to be wholly and absolutely the early work of Shakspere. But we do not necessarily hold that they were his earliest work; for the proof is so absolute of the continual improvements and elaborations which he made in his best productions, that it would be difficult to say that some of the plays which have the most finished air, but of which there were no early editions, may not be founded upon very youthful compositions. Others may have wholly perished; thrown aside after a season; never printed; and neglected by their author, to whom new inventions would be easier than remodellings of pieces probably composed upon a false theory of art. For it is too much to imagine that his first productions would be wholly untainted by the taste of the period. Some might have been weak delineations of life and character, overloaded with mythological conceits and pastoral affectations, like the plays of Lyly, which were the Court fashion before 1590. Others might have been prompted by the false ambition to produce effect, which is the characteristic of Locrine, and partially so of Titus Andronicus. But of one thing we may be sure—that there would be no want of power even in his first productions; that real poetry would have gushed out of the bombast, and true wit sparkled amidst the conceits. His first plays would, we think, fall in with the prevailing desire of the people to learn the history of their country through the stage. If so, they would certainly not exhibit the feebleness of some of those performances which were popular about the period of which we are now speaking, and which continued to be popular even after he had most successfully undertaken

> "To raise our ancient sovereigns from their hearse."

The door of the theatre was not a difficult one for him to enter. It is a singular fact, that several of the most eminent actors of this very period are held to have been his immediate neighbours. The petition to the Privy Council, which has proved that Shakspere was a sharer in the Blackfriars playhouse in 1589, contains the names of sixteen shareholders, he being the twelfth on the list. The head of the Company was James Burbage; the second, Richard Burbage his son. Malone suspected that both John Heminge, one of the editors of Shakspere's Collected Works, and Richard Burbage, "were Shakspere's countrymen, and that Heminge was born at Shottery." His conjecture with regard to Heminge was founded upon entries in the baptismal register of Stratford, which show that there was a John Heminge at Shottery in 1567, and a Richard Heminge in 1570. Mr. Collier has shewn that a John Burbadge was bailiff of Stratford in 1555; and that many of the same name were residents in Warwickshire. But Mr. Hunter believes that Richard Burbage was a native of London. A letter addressed by Lord Southampton to Lord Ellesmere in 1608, introducing Burbage and Shakspere to ask protection of that nobleman, then Lord Chancellor, against some threatened molestation from the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London, says, "they are both of one county, and indeed almost

of one town." This would be decisive, had some doubts not been thrown upon the authenticity of this document. We do not therefore rely upon the assumption that William Shakspere and Richard Burbage were originally neighbours. But from the visits of the Queen's players to Stratford, Shakspere might have made friends with Burbage and Heminge, and have seen that the profession of an actor, however disgraced by some men of vicious manners, performing in the inn-yards and smaller theatres of London, numbered amongst its members men of correct lives and honourable character. Even the enemy of plays and players, Stephen Gosson, had been compelled to acknowledge this: "It is well known that some of them are sober, discreet, properly learned, honest householders, and citizens well thought on among their neighbours at home."* It was a lucrative profession, too; especially to those who had the honour of being the Queen's Servants. Their theatre was frequented by persons of rank and fortune; the prices of admission were high; they were called upon not unfrequently to present their performances before the Queen herself, and their reward was a royal one. The object thus offered to the ambition of a young man, conscious of his own powers, would be glittering enough to induce him, not very unwillingly, to quit the tranquil security of his native home. But we inverse the usual belief in this matter. We think that Shakspere became an actor because he was a dramatic writer, and not a dramatic writer because he was an actor. He very quickly made his way to wealth and reputation, not so much by a handsome person and pleasing manners, as by that genius which left all other competitors far behind him in the race of dramatic composition; and by that prudence which taught him to combine the exercise of his extraordinary powers with a constant reference to the course of life he had chosen, not lowering his art for the advancement of his fortune, but achieving his fortune in showing what mighty things might be accomplished by his art.

There is a subject, however, which we are now called upon to examine, which may have had a material influence upon the determination of Shakspere to throw himself upon the wide and perilous sea of London dramatic society. We have uniformly contended against the assertion that the poverty of John Shakspere prevented him giving his son a grammar-school education. We believe that all the supposed evidences of that poverty, at the period of Shakspere's boyhood, are extremely vague and contradictory.† But, on the other hand, it appears to us more than probable that after William Shakspere had the expenses of a family to meet, there were changes, and very natural ones, in the worldly position of his father, and consequently of his own, which might have rendered it necessary that the son should abandon the tranquil course of a rural life which he probably contemplated when he married, and make a strenuous and a noble exertion for independence, in a career which his peculiar genius opened to him. We will first state the facts which appear to bear upon the supposed difficulties of John Shakspere, about the period when William may be held to have joined Burbage's company in London—facts which are far from indicating any thing like ruin, but which exhibit some involvements and uneasiness.

In 1578 John Shakspere mortgaged his property of Asbies, acquired by marriage. Four years before this he purchased two freehold houses in Stratford, which he always retained. In 1578, therefore, he wanted capital. In 1579 he sold an interest in some property at Snitterfield. But then, in 1580, he tendered the mortgage money to the mortgagee of the Asbies' estate, which was illegally refused, on the pretence that other money was owing. A Chancery suit was the consequence, which was undetermined in 1597. In an action for debt in the bailiff's court in 1586, the return of the serjeants-at-mace upon a warrant of distress against John Shak-

* "School of Abuse," 1579. † See Book II., Chap. I.

spere is, that he had nothing to distrain upon. It is held, therefore, that all the household gear was then gone. Is it not more credible that the family lived elsewhere? Mr. Hunter has discovered that a John Shakspere lived at Clifford, a pretty village near Stratford, in 1579, he being described in a will of 1583 as indebted to the estate of John Ashwell, of Stratford. His removal from Stratford borough as a resident, is corroborated by the fact that he was irregular in his attendance at the halls of the corporation, after 1578; and was finally, in 1586, removed from the body, for that he "doth not come to the halls when they be warned." And yet, as there were fines for non-attendance, as pointed out by Mr. Halliwell, there is some proof that he clung to the civic honours, even at a personal cost; though, from some cause, and that probably non-residence, he did not perform the civic duties. Lastly, he is returned in 1592, with other persons, as not attending church, and this remark is appended to a list of nine persons, in which is the name of "*Mr.* John Shackespere,"—"It is said that these last nine come not to church for fear of process for debt." If he had been residing in the borough it would have been quite unnecessary to execute the process in the sacred precincts;—he evidently lived and was occupied out of the borough. It is tolerably clear that the traffic of Henley Street, whether of wool, or skins, or carcases, was at an end. John Shakspere, the yeoman, was farming; and, like many other agriculturists, in all districts, and all times, was a sufferer from causes over which he had no control. There were peculiar circumstances at that period which, temporarily, would have materially affected his property.

In 1580 John Shakspere tendered the mortgage-money for his wife's inheritance at Asbies. The property was rising in value;—the mortgagee would not give it up. He had taken possession, and had leased it, as we learn from the Chancery proceedings. He alleges, in 1597, that John Shakspere wanted to obtain possession, because the lease was expiring, "whereby a greater value is to be yearly raised." Other property was sold to obtain the means of making this tender. John Shakspere would probably have occupied his estate of Asbies, could he have obtained possession. But he was unlawfully kept out; and he became a tenant of some other land, in addition to what he held of his own. There was, at this particular period, a remarkable pressure upon proprietors and tenants who did not watchfully mark the effects of an increased abundance of money—a prodigious rise in the value of all commodities, through the greater supply of the precious metals. In "A Briefe Conceipte touching the Commonweale," already quoted,* there is, in the dialogue between the landowner, the husbandman, the merchant, the manufacturer, and the doctor of divinity, a complaint on the part of the landowner, which appears to offer a parallel case to that of John Shakspere:—"All of my sort—I mean all gentlemen—have great cause to complain, now that the prices of things are so risen of all hands, that you may better live after your degree than we; for you may and do raise the price of your wares as the prices of victuals and other necessaries do rise, and so cannot we so much; for though it be true, that of such lands as come to hands either by purchase or by determination and ending of such terms of years that I or my ancestors had granted them in time past, I do receive a better fine than of old was used, or enhance the rent thereof, being forced thereto for the charge of my household, that is so encreased over that it was; yet in all my lifetime I look not that the third part of my land shall come to my disposition, that I may enhance the rent of the same, but it shall be in men's holding either by leases or by copy granted before my time, and still continuing, and yet like to continue in the same state for the most part during my life, and percase my sons. * * * * * * We are forced therefore to minish the third part of our household, or to raise the

* Page 12.

third part of our revenues, and for that we cannot so do of our own lands that is already in the hands of other men, many of us are enforced to keep pieces of our own lands when they fall in our own possession, or to purchase some farm of other men's lands, and to store it with sheep or some other cattle, to help make up the decay of our revenues, and to maintain our old estate withal, and yet all is little enough."

In such a transition state, we may readily imagine John Shakspere to have been a sufferer. But his struggle was a short one. He may have owed debts he was unable to pay, and have gone through some seasons of difficulty, deriving small rents from his own lands, "in the hands of other men," and enforced to hold "some farm of other men's lands" at an advanced rent. Yet this is not ruin and degradation. He maintained his social position; and it is pleasant to imagine that his illustrious son devoted some portion of the first rewards of his labour to make the condition of his father easier in that time of general uneasiness and difficulty. In ten years prosperity brightened the homes of that family. The poet bought the best house in Stratford; the yeoman applied to the College of Arms for bearings that would exhibit his gentle lineage, and asserted that he was a man of landed substance, sufficient to uphold the pretension. But in the period of rapid changes in the value of property,—a transition which, from the time of Latimer, was producing the most remarkable effects on the social condition of all the people of England, pressing severely upon many, although it was affording the sure means of national progress,—it is more than probable that Shakspere's father gradually found himself in straitened circumstances. This change in his condition might have directed his son to a new course of life which might be entered upon without any large pecuniary means, and which offered to his ambition a fair field for the exercise of his peculiar genius. There was probably a combination of necessity and of choice which gave us "Hamlet" and "Lear." If William Shakspere had remained at Stratford he would have been a poet—a greater, perhaps, than the author of "The Faery Queen;" but that species of literature which it was for him to build up, almost out of chaos, and to carry onward to a perfection beyond the excellence of any other age, might have been for him "an unweeded garden."

NOTE.

Mr. Halliwell, in the Preface to his "Life," has done me the favour to call public attention to my ignorance of "Palæography," in reference to my publication of some documents on which the preceding statements are founded. He says, "Mr. Knight is, I believe, the only one of late years who has referred to the originals, ("records of Stratford-on-Avon,") but the very slight notice he has taken of them, and the *portentous mistakes* he has committed in cases where printed copies were not to be found, would appear to show that they were unintelligible to that writer." In one other passage Mr. Halliwell has conferred on me the greater favour of pointing out the number of "*the portentous mistakes*" in two documents out of the four which I gave from reference "to the originals." As to the others he is silent. He says, as to these two documents, "Malone makes thirty-one errors, and Mr. Knight, who professes in this instance to see the value of accuracy in such matters, and to correct his predecessors, falls into twenty-six." I acknowledge my own errors, with deep humility; and I owe the public a duty to show what these *twenty-six* "portentous mistakes" are, and how they ought to be corrected from Mr. Halliwell's transcripts, founded upon his knowledge of "palæography," which he describes as "a *science* essentially necessary in the investigation of contracted records of the sixteenth century, especially of those written in Latin." But Mr. Halliwell is too indulgent to me. I have exceeded the number of Malone's errors by two. Of course I assume that in reading these mouldy and blurred records Mr. Halliwell is infallible in the matters of *ys* and *it*. In his case no one can believe in the possibility of a doubt.

"At his word
Is *A* deposed, and *B* with pomp restor'd."

Mr. Knight's Errors.	Mr. Halliwell's True Readings.	Mr. Knight's Errors.	Mr. Halliwell's True Readings.
1. ibm. .	ibidem	18. appear .	appeare
2. dnæ. .	dominæ	19. ibm. .	ibidem
3. Elizabeth.	Elizabethæ	20. a? . .	anno
4. &c. . .	reginæ nostræ, &c.	21. dnæ. .	dominæ
5. is . .	ys	22. &c. . .	reginæ nostræ, &c.
6. , . .	no comma	23. is . .	ys
7. such .	suche	24. ordeined .	ordened
8. towards .	towardes	25. towards .	towardes
9. three .	thre	26. releif .	relief
10. burgess .	burgese	27. saving .	savinge
11. such .	suche	28. omitted .	Mr.
12. paye .	pay	29. omitted .	Mr.
13. iv*d.* .	iiijd.	30. Plimley .	Plumley
14. Plymley .	Plumley	31. pay . .	paye
15. omitted .	Aldermen	32. burgesses	burgeses
16. sum. .	Summa	33. weekely .	weekeley
17. inhabitants	inhabitantes		

I think it my further duty "to make a clean breast," as my fellow-criminals say, and acknowledge my faults in the other *Latin* document I examined. I have omitted in my copy of a Writ the words "*eundem*" and "*prædicti*,"—recondite words, which to have passed over was not only a crime but a fault—a critical sin and a "portentous mistake"—an ignorance of the science of "Palæography," which, to use the words of one who knew all sciences, "wholly disqualifies for the office of critic." One has come to enlighten the world, who, by the light of "science," does know that *ibm.* means *ibidem*, and *dnæ. dominæ.* I am grateful.

[A Play at the Blackfriars.]

CHAPTER II.

A NEW PLAY.

AMONGST those innumerable by-ways in London which are familiar to the hurried pedestrian, there is a well-known line of streets, or rather lanes, leading from the hill on which St. Paul's stands to the great thoroughfare of Blackfriars Bridge. The pavement is narrow, the carriage-way is often blocked up by contending carmen, the houses are mean; yet the whole district is full of interesting associations. We have scarcely turned out of Ludgate Street, under a narrow archway, when the antiquary may descry a large lump of the ancient city wall embedded in the lath and plaster of a modern dwelling. A little farther, and we pass the Hall

of the Apothecaries, who have here, by dint of long and earnest struggle, raised their original shopkeeping vocation into a science. A little onward, and the name Printing-house Yard indicates another aspect of civilization. Here was the King's printing-house in the days of the Stuarts; and here, in our own days, is the office of the "Times" Newspaper, the organ of a greater power than that of prerogative. Between Apothecaries' Hall and Printing-house Yard is a short lane, leading into an open space called Playhouse Yard. It is one of those shabby places of which so many in London lie close to the glittering thoroughfares; but which are known only to their own inhabitants, and have at all times an air of quiet which seems like desolation. The houses of this little square, or yard, are neither ancient nor modern. Some of them were probably built soon after the great fire of London; for a few present their gable fronts to the streets, and the wide casements of others have evidently been filled up and modern sashes inserted. But there is nothing here, nor indeed in the whole precinct, with the exception of the few yards of the ancient wall, that has any pretension to belong to what may be called the antiquities of London. Yet here, three centuries ago, stood the great religious house of the Dominicans, or Black Friars, who were the lords of the precinct; shutting out all civic authority, and enclosing within their four gates a busy community of shopkeepers and artificers. Here, in the hallowed dust of the ancient church, were the royal and the noble buried; and their gilded tombs proclaimed their virtues to the latest posterity. Where shall we look for a fragment of these records now? Here parliaments have sat and pulled down odious favourites; here kings have required exorbitant aids from their complaining subjects; here Wolsey pronounced the sentence of divorce on the persecuted Katharine. In a few years the house of the Black Friars ceased to exist; their halls were pulled down; their church fell into ruin. The precinct of the Blackfriars then became a place of fashionable residence. Elizabeth, at the age of sixty, here danced at a wedding which united the houses of Worcester and Bedford. In the heart of this precinct, close by the church of the suppressed monastery, surrounded by the new houses of the nobility, in the very spot which is known as Playhouse Yard, was built, in 1575, the Blackfriars' Theatre.

The history of the early stage, as it is to be deduced from statutes, and proclamations, and orders of council, exhibits a constant succession of conflicts between the civic authorities and the performers of plays. The act of the 14th of Elizabeth, "for the punishment of vagabonds, and for relief of the poor and impotent," was essentially an act of protection for the established companies of players. We have here, for the first time, a definition of rogues and vagabonds; and it includes not only those who can "give no reckoning how he or she doth lawfully get his or her living," but "all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, and minstrels, not belonging to any baron of this realm, or towards any other honourable personage of greater degree; all jugglers, pedlers, tinkers, and petty chapmen; which said fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, minstrels, jugglers, pedlers, tinkers, and petty chapmen, shall wander abroad, and have not licence of two justices of the peace at the least, whereof one to be of the quorum, where and in what shire they shall happen to wander." The circumstance of belonging to any baron, or person of greater degree, was in itself a pretty large exception; and if in those times of rising puritanism the licence of two justices of the peace was not always to be procured, the large number of companies enrolled as the servants of the nobility offers sufficient evidence that the profession of a player was not a persecuted one, but one expressly sanctioned by the ruling powers. The very same statute throws by implication as much odium upon scholars as upon players; for amongst its vagabonds are included "all scholars of the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge that go about begging, not

being authorised under the seal of the said Universities."* There was one company of players, the Earl of Leicester's, which within two years after the legislative protection of this act received a more important privilege from the Queen herself. In 1574 a writ of privy seal was issued to the keeper of the great seal, commanding him to set forth letters patent addressed to all justices, &c., licensing and authorizing James Burbage, and four other persons, servants to the Earl of Leicester, "to use, exercise, and occupy the art and faculty of playing comedies, tragedies, interludes, stage-plays, and such other like as they have already used and studied, or hereafter shall use and study, as well for the recreation of our loving subjects, as for our solace and pleasure, when we shall think good to see them." And they were to exhibit their performances "as well within our city of London and liberties of the same," as "throughout our realm of England." Without knowing how far the servants of the Earl of Leicester might have been molested by the authorities of the city of London, in defiance of this patent, it is clear that the patent was of itself insufficient to insure their kind reception within the city; for it appears that, within three months after the date of the patent, a letter was written from the Privy Council to the Lord Mayor, directing him "to admit the comedy-players within the city of London, and to be otherwise favourably used." This mandate was probably obeyed; but in 1575 the Court of Common Council, without any exception for the objects of the patent of 1574, made certain orders, in the city language termed an act, which assumed that the whole authority for the regulation of plays was in the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen; that they only could license theatrical exhibitions within the city; and that the players whom they did license should contribute half their receipts to charitable purposes. The civic authorities appear to have stretched their power somewhat too far; for in that very year James Burbage, and the other servants of the Earl of Leicester, erected their theatre amidst the houses of the great in the Blackfriars, within a stone's throw of the city walls, but absolutely out of the control of the city officers. The immediate neighbours of the players were the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Hunsdon, as we learn from a petition against the players from the inhabitants of the precinct.† The petition was unavailing. The rooms which it states "one Burbadge hath lately bought" were converted "into a common playhouse;" and within fourteen years from the period of its erection William Shakspere was one of its proprietors.

It would not be an easy matter, without some knowledge of minute facts and a considerable effort of imagination, to form an accurate notion of that building in the Blackfriars—rooms converted into a common playhouse—in which we may conclude that the first plays of Shakspere were exhibited. The very expression used by the petitioners against Burbage's project would imply that the building was not very nicely adapted to the purposes of dramatic representation. They say, "which rooms the said Burbage is now altering, and meaneth very shortly to convert and turn the same into a common playhouse." And yet we are not to infer that the rooms were hastily adapted to their object by the aid of a few boards and drapery, like the barn of a strolling company. In 1596 the shareholders say, in a petition to the Privy Council, that the theatre, "by reason of its having been so long built, hath fallen into great decay, and that, besides the reparation thereof, it has been found necessary to make the same more convenient for the entertainment of auditories coming thereto." The structure, no doubt, was adapted to its object without any very

* It is curious that the act against vagabonds of the 39th of Elizabeth somewhat softens this matter; for in its definition of vagabonds it includes "all persons *calling* themselves scholars, going about begging." It says nothing, with regard to players, about the licence of two justices; and requires that the nobleman's licence shall be under his hand and seal.

† Lord Hunsdon's name appears to this petition, but the Lord Chamberlain's does not appear.

great regard to durability; and the accommodations, both for actors and audience, were of a somewhat rude nature. The Blackfriars' was a winter theatre; so that, differing from the Globe, which belonged to the same company, it was, there can be little doubt, roofed in. It appears surprising that, in a climate like that of England, even a summer theatre should be without a roof; but the surprise is lessened when we consider that, when the Globe was built, in 1594, not twenty years had elapsed since plays were commonly represented in the open yards of the inns of London. The Belle Savage* was amongst the most famous of these inn-yard theatres; and even the present area of that inn will show how readily it might be adapted for such performances. We turn aside from the crowds of Ludgate Hill, and pass down a gateway which opens into a considerable space. The present inn occupies the east and north sides of the area, the west side consists of private houses of business. But formerly the inn occupied the entire of the three sides, with open galleries running all round, and communicating with the chambers. Raise a platform with its back to the gateway for the actors, place benches in the galleries which run round three sides of the area, and let those who pay the least price be contented with standing-room in the yard, and a theatre, with its stage, pit, and boxes, is raised as quickly as the palace of Aladdin. The Blackfriars' theatre was probably therefore little more than a large space, arranged pretty much like the Belle Savage yard, but with a roof over it. Indeed, so completely were the public theatres adapted after the model of the temporary ones, that the space for the "groundlings" long continued to be called the yard. One of the earliest theatres, built probably about the same time as the Blackfriars', was called the Curtain, from which we may infer that the refinement of separating the actors from the audience during the intervals of the representation was at first peculiar to that theatre.

In the petition to the Privy Council in 1596 it is stated that the petitioners "are owners and players of the *private* house or theatre in the precinct or liberty of the Blackfriars." Yet the petition of the inhabitants of the precinct against the enterprise of Burbage, in 1576, states the intention of Burbage to convert the rooms which he has bought "into a common playhouse," and it alleges the inconvenience that will result from the "gathering together of all manner of vagrant and lewd persons, under colour of resorting to the plays." Here then is an apparent contradiction,—the Blackfriars' theatre is called a private house and also a common playhouse. But the seeming contradiction is reconciled when we learn that for many years a distinction was preserved between public and private theatres. The theatres of inn-yards were undoubtedly public theatres. The yard was hired for some short period, the scaffold hastily run up, and the gates closed, except to those who came with penny in hand. Such were the theatres of the Belle Savage in Ludgate Hill, the Cross Keys in Gracechurch Street, and the Bull in Bishopsgate Street. But, as we learn from a passage in an old topographer, in which he expressly mentions the Belle Savage, the penny at the theatre-gate was something like the penny at the porch of our cathedral show-shops of the present day,—other pennies were demanded for a peep at the sights within. "Those who go to Paris Garden, the Belsavage, or Theatre, to behold bear-baiting, interludes, or fence-play, must not account of any pleasant spectacle, unless first they pay one penny at the gate, another at the entry of the scaffold, and a third for quiet standing."† The Paris Garden here mentioned was the old bear-baiting place which had existed from the time of Henry VIII., and perhaps earlier. The Belle Savage, rude as its accommodations doubtless were, had yet its graces and amenities, if Stephen Gosson be not a partial critic: "The two prose books played at the Bel-savage, where you shall find never a word without wit,

* The old writers spell the word less learnedly than we—*Bel-savage.*

† Lambarde's "Perambulation of Kent," 1576.

never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain."* The Theatre also mentioned by Lambarde was a public playhouse so called. It was situated in Shoreditch, without the City walls. In Aggas's map we see a tolerably continuous street, leading from Bishop's Gate to Shoreditch Church; but on each side of this street there is a wide extent of fields and gardens; Spital field to the east, and Finsbury field to the west, with rude figures, in the map, of cows and horses, archers, laundresses, and water-carriers, which show how completely this large district, now so crowded with human life in all its phases of comfort and misery, was in the days of Elizabeth a rural suburb. Stow, in the first edition of his "Survey," 1599, mentions the old Priory of St. John the Baptist, called Holy well. "The church thereof being pulled down, many houses have been there builded for the lodgings of noblemen, of strangers born, and other. And near thereunto are builded two public-houses for the acting and show of comedies, tragedies, and histories, for recreation. Whereof the one is called the Curtain, the other the Theatre, both standing on the south-west side toward the field."† In a sermon by John Stockwood, in 1578, the Theatre is called a "gorgeous playing place." Stubbes, in 1583, rails bitterly against these public playhouses: "Mark the flocking and running to Theatres and Curtains." The early history of the less important theatres is necessarily involved in great obscurity. There were playhouses on the Bankside, against the immoralities of which, particularly as to playing on Sundays, the inhabitants of Southwark complained to the authorities in 1587; but it is not known when Henslowe's playhouse, the Rose, which was in that neighbourhood, was erected. The Swan and the Hope, also theatres of the Bankside, were probably, as well as the Rose, mean erections in the infancy of the stage, which afterwards grew into importance. There was an ancient theatre also at Newington, which offered its attractions to the holiday-makers who sallied out of the City to practise at the Butts.

In the continuation of Stow's "Chronicle," by Edmund Howes, there is a very curious passage, which carries us back from the period in which he was writing (1631) for sixty years. He describes the destruction of the Globe by fire in 1613, the burning of the Fortune Playhouse four years after, the rebuilding of both theatres, and the erection of "a new fair playhouse near the Whitefriars." He then adds,—"And this is the seventeenth stage, or common playhouse, which hath been new made within the space of threescore years within London and the suburbs, viz.: five inns, or common hostelries, turned to playhouses, one Cockpit, St. Paul's singing-school, one in the Blackfriars, and one in the Whitefriars, which was built last of all, in the year one thousand six hundred twenty-nine. All the rest not named were erected only for common playhouses, besides the new-built Bear-garden, which was built as well for plays, and fencers' prizes, as bull-baiting; besides one in former time at Newington Butts. Before the space of threescore years abovesaid, I neither knew, heard, nor read of any such theatres, set stages, or playhouses, as have been purposely built within man's memory." It would appear, as far as we can judge from the very imperfect materials which exist, that in the early period of Shakspere's connection with the Blackfriars' it was the only private theatre. At a subsequent period the Cockpit, or Phœnix, in Drury Lane, was a private theatre; and so was the theatre in Salisbury Court,—the "new fair playhouse near the Whitefriars" of Howes. What then was the distinction between the private theatre of the Blackfriars, of which Shakspere was a shareholder in 1589, and the permanent and temporary public theatres with which it entered into competition? It is natural to

* "School of Abuse," 1579.

† Mr. Collier, who originally pointed out this passage, by comparing the printed copy with Stow's manuscript in the British Museum, found that "activities" (tumbling) were mentioned as performed at these theatres, as well as plays.

conclude that the proprietors of this theatre, being the Queen's servants, not merely nominally, but the sworn officers of her household, were the most respectable of their vocation; conformed to the ordinances of the state with the utmost scrupulousness; endeavoured to attract a select audience rather than an uncritical multitude; and received higher prices for admission than were paid at the public theatres. The performances at the Blackfriars' were for the most part in the winter. Whether the performances were in the day or evening, artificial lights were used. The audience in what we now call the pit (then also so called) sat upon benches, and did not stand as in the yard open to the sky of the public playhouses. There were small rooms corresponding with the private boxes of existing theatres. A portion of the audience, including those who aspired to the distinction of critics, sat upon the stage. "Though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on the stage at Blackfriars to arraign plays daily," says the preface to the first folio of Shakspere. The passage we have quoted from Lambarde gives us a notion of the prices of admission at the very early theatres. Those who paid a penny for the "entry of the scaffold" had of course privileges not obtained by those who merely paid "the penny at the gate;" and those who, when they had reached the scaffold, had to pay another penny "for quiet standing," had no doubt the advantage of some railed-off space, in some degree similar to the stalls of the modern pit. But the mass of the audience must have been the penny payers. The passages in old plays and tracts which allude to the prices of admission, for the most part belong to the high and palmy period of the stage. But we learn from one of Lyly's tracts, in 1590, that the admission at "The Theatre" was twopence, and at St. Paul's fourpence; though a penny still seems from other authorities to have been the common price. It is possible, and indeed there is some evidence, that the rate of admission even then varied according to the attraction of the performance; and we may be pretty sure that a company like that of Shakspere's generally charged at a higher rate than the larger theatres, which depended more upon the multitude. At a much later period, Ben Jonson and Fletcher mention a price as high as half-a-crown; and the lowest price which Jonson mentions is sixpence. At a later period still, Jonson speaks of the sixpenny mechanics of the Blackfriars. Those who sat upon the stage, it would appear, paid sixpence for a stool, in addition to their payment for admission. With these preliminary notices we may proceed to the picture of a new play at the Blackfriars', about a year or so before the period when it has been ascertained that Shakspere was one amongst the sixteen shareholders of that company, with four other shareholders, and those not unimportant persons, below him on the list.

On the posts of the principal thoroughfares of the City a little bill is affixed, announcing that a new History will be performed at the private theatre of the Blackfriars. The passengers are familiar with such bills; they were numerous enough in the year 1587 to make it of sufficient importance that one printer should be licensed by the Stationers' Company for their production. At an early hour in the afternoon the watermen are actively landing their passengers at the Blackfriars' Stairs; and there are hasty steps along the narrow thoroughfares to the south of Lud Gate. The pit of the Blackfriars is soon filled. The people for the most part wait for the performance in tolerable quiet, but now and then a disturbance takes place. If we may judge from sober documents and allusive satires, London was never so full of cheats and bullies as about this period. There is a curious passage in Henry Chettle's "Kind-Harte's Dream," printed in 1593, in which tract the author, "sitting alone not long since, not far from Finsbury, in a taphouse of antiquity, attending the coming of such companions as might wash care away with carousing," falls asleep, and has a vision of five personages, amongst whom is Tarleton, the famous clown. In the discourse which Tarleton makes is this passage:

—"And let Tarleton entreat the young people of the city, either to abstain altogether from plays, or at their coming thither to use themselves after a more quiet order. In a place so civil as this city is esteemed, it is more than barbarously rude to see the shameful disorder and routs that sometime in such public meetings are used. The beginners are neither gentlemen nor citizens, nor any of both their servants, but some lewd mates that long for innovation; and when they see advantage that either servingmen or apprentices are most in number they will be of either side.* Though indeed they are of no side, but men beside all honesty, willing to make booty of cloaks, hats, purses, or whatever they can lay hold on in a hurley-burley. These are the common causers of discord in public places. If otherwise it happen, as it seldom doth, that any quarrel be between man and man, it is far from manhood to make so public a place their field to fight in: no men will do it but cowards that would fain be parted, or have hope to have many partakers." Amongst the quiet audience the sellers of nuts and pippins are gliding. Ever and anon a cork bounces out of a bottle of ale. Tobacco was not as yet. While the audience are impatiently waiting for the three soundings of trumpet that precede the prologue, a noise of many voices is heard behind the curtain which separates them from the stage. The noise is not of the actors; but of the crowd of spectators who have entered by the tiring-room door, and are struggling for places, or in eager groups communicating their expectations of the performance, and their opinions of the author. Amongst this crowd would be the dramatic writers of the time, who in all probability then, as without doubt at a subsequent period, had a free admission to the theatres generally, the stage being their prescriptive place.

In his Induction to "Cynthia's Revels," Jonson has a humorous passage which very clearly describes the arrangements for the critics and gallants; and shows also the intercourse which the author was expected to have with his part of the audience. The play was originally performed by the children of the Queen's Chapel; and in this Induction they give us a picture of the ignorant critic and another gallant with remarkable spirit:—

"3 *Child.* Now, Sir, suppose I am one of your genteel auditors, that am come in, having paid my money at the door, with much ado, and here I take my place and sit down: I have my three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin:—'By this light, I wonder that any man is so mad to come to see these rascally tits play here!—They do act like so many wrens, or pismires—not the fifth part of a good face amongst them all.—And then their music is abominable—able to stretch a man's ears worse than ten pillories; and their ditties—most lamentable things, like the pitiful fellows that make them—poets. But this vapour, an 'twere not for tobacco—I think—the very stench of 'em would poison me. I should not dare to come in at their gates.—A man were better visit fifteen jails—or a dozen or two of hospitals—than once adventure to come near them.' How is 't? Well?

1 *Child.* Excellent. Give me my cloak.

3 *Child.* Stay; you shall see me do another now, but a more sober, or better-gather'd gallant; that is, as it may be thought, some friend or well-wisher to the house: and here I enter.

1 *Child.* What, upon the stage too?

2 *Child.* Yes; and I step forth like one of the children, and ask you, Would you have a stool, Sir?

3 *Child.* A stool, boy?

2 *Child.* Ay, Sir, if you 'll give me sixpence, I 'll fetch you one.

3 *Child.* For what, I pray thee? What shall I do with it?

* This indicates a state of quarrel between the servingmen and apprentices.

2 *Child.* O Lord, Sir! Will you betray your ignorance so much? Why throw yourself in state on the stage, as other gentlemen use, Sir.

3 *Child.* Away, wag! What, wouldst thou make an implement of me? . . . . *I would speak with your author; where is he?*

2 *Child.* Not this way, I assure you, Sir; we are not so officiously befriended by him as to have his presence in the tiring-house, to prompt us aloud, stamp at the bookholder, swear for our properties, curse the poor tireman, rail the music out of tune, and sweat for every venial trespass we commit, as some author would, if he had such fine engles as we."

It may be presumed from this passage, that it was not uncommon for the author to mix with that part of the audience which sate upon the stage. We may imagine the young "maker" composedly moving amidst this throng of wits and critics. He moves amongst them modestly, but without any false humility. In worldly station, if such a consideration could influence his demeanour, he is fully the equal of his brother poets. They are for the most part, as he himself is, actors, as well as makers of plays. Phillips says Marlowe was an actor. Greene is reasonably conjectured to have been an actor. Peele and Wilson were actors of Shakspere's own company; and so was Anthony Wadeson. The curtain is drawn back, slowly, and with little of mechanical contrivance. The rush-strewn stage is presented to the spectators. The play to be performed is "Henry VI." The funeral procession of Henry V. enters to a dead march; a few mourners in sable robes following the bier. The audience is silent as the imaginary corse; but their imaginations are not stimulated with gorgeous scenery. There is no magical perspective of the lofty roof and long-drawn aisles of Westminster Abbey; no organ peals, no trains of choristers with tapers and censers sing the Requiem. The rushes on the floor are matched with the plain arras on the walls. Bedford speaks:—

"Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night."

Lofty is his tone, corresponding with the solemn and unvarying rhythm. It is the "drumming decasyllabon" which Nashe ridicules. The great master of a freer versification is not yet confident of his power. The attention of the auditory is fixed by the stirring introduction. There are old remembrances of national honour in every line. The action moves rapidly. The mourners disperse; and by an effort of imagination the scene must be changed from England to France. Charles the king marches with drum and soldiers. The English are encountered, the French are beaten. The Maid of Orleans appears. The people will see the old French wars which live in their memories fought over again; and their spirits rise with every alarum. But the poet will show too the ruinous course of faction at home. The servingmen of Gloucester and Winchester battle at the Tower gates. The Mayor of London and his officers suppress the riot. Again to Orleans, where Salisbury is slain by a "fatal hand." All is bustle and contention in France; but the course of intrigue in England is unfolded. The first page of the fatal history of York and Lancaster is here read. We see the growth of civil war at home; we trace the beginnings of disaster abroad. The action presents a succession of events, rather than developing some great event brought about by a skilful adjustment of many parts. But in a "chronicle history" this was scarcely to be avoided; and it is easy to see how, until the great principle of art which should produce a "Lear" and a "Macbeth" was evolved, the independent succession of events in a chronicle history would not only be the easiest to portray by a young writer, but would be the most acceptable to an uncritical audience, that had not yet been taught the dependences of a catastrophe upon slight preceding incidents, upon niceties of character, upon passion evolved out of seeming tranquility, the danger of which has been skilfully

shadowed forth to the careful observer. It was in detached passages, therefore, that the young poet would put out his strength in such a play. The death of Talbot and his son was a fit occasion for such an effort; and the early stage had certainly seen nothing comparable in power and beauty to the couplets which exhibit the fall of the hero and his boy. Other poets would have described the scene. Shakspere dramatized it; and his success is well noticed by Thomas Nashe, who for once loses his satirical vein in fervent admiration:—"How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that, after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding!"* The prejudices of the age are gratified by the condemnation of the Pucelle; but the poet takes care to make it felt that her judges are "bloody homicides." At the very close of the play a new series of events is opened, ending here with the mission of Suffolk to bring a bride for the imbecile king; but showing that the issue is to be presented in some coming story.

* "Pierce Pennilesse."

[Old London.]

CHAPTER III.

THE ONLY SHAKE-SCENE.

A BELIEF has been long entertained in England, that Greene and Peele either wrote in conjunction the Second and Third Parts of Henry VI., originally published as the two Parts of the "Contention," or that Greene wrote one Part, and Peele the other Part; or that, at any rate, Greene had some share in these dramas. This was a theory propagated by Malone in his "Dissertation;" and it rests, not upon the slightest examination of the works of these writers, but solely on a far-famed passage in Greene's posthumous pamphlet, the "Groat's Worth of Wit," in which he points out Shakspere as "a crow beautified with our feathers."

The entire pamphlet of Greene's is, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary fragments of autobiography that the vanity or the repentance of a sinful man ever produced. The recital which he makes of his abandoned course of life involves not only a confession of crimes and follies which were common to a very licentious age, but of particular and especial depravities, which even to mention argues as much shamelessness as repentance. The portion, however, which relates to the subject

before us stands alone, in conclusion, as a friendly warning out of his own terrible example :—"To those gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plays, R. G. wisheth a better exercise, and wisdom to prevent his extremities." To three of his quondam acquaintance the dying man addresses himself. To the first, supposed to be Marlowe—"thou famous gracer of tragedians"—he speaks in words as terrible as came from

> "that warning voice, which he who saw
> Th' Apocalypse heard cry in heaven aloud."

In exhorting his friend to turn from atheism, he ran the risk of consigning him to the stake, for Francis Kett was burnt for his opinions only three years before Greene's death. That Marlowe resented this address to him we have the testimony of Chettle. With his second friend, supposed to be Lodge, his plain speaking is much more tender : "Be advised, and get not many enemies by bitter words." He addresses the third, supposed to be Peele, as one "driven as myself to extreme shifts ;" and he adds, "thou art unworthy better hap sith thou dependest on so mean a stay." What is the stay ? "Making plays." The exhortation then proceeds to include the three "gentlemen his quondam acquaintance that spend their wits in making plays."—"Base-minded men all three of you, if by my misery ye be not warned : for unto none of you, like me, sought those burs to cleave ; those puppets, I mean, that speak from our mouths : those antics garnished in our colours." Up to this point the meaning is perfectly clear. The puppets, the antics,—by which names of course are meant the players, whom he held, and justly, to derive their chief importance from the labours of the poet, in the words which they uttered and the colours with which they were garnished,—had once cleaved to him like burs.

But a change had taken place : "Is it not strange that I, to whom they all have been beholding—is it not like that you, to whom they all have been beholding, shall, were ye in that case that I am now, be, both, of them at once forsaken ?" This is a lamentable picture of one whose powers, wasted by dissipation and enfeebled by sickness, were no longer required by those to whom they had once been serviceable. As he was forsaken, so he holds that his friends will be forsaken. And chiefly for what reason ? "Yes, trust them not : for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that, with *his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank-verse as the best of you : and, being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." There can be no doubt that Shakspere was here pointed at ; that the starving man spoke with exceeding bitterness of the successful author ; that he affected to despise him as a player ; that, if "beautified with our feathers" had a stronger meaning than "garnished in our colours," it conveyed a vague charge of borrowing from other poets ; and that he parodied a line from "The Contention." This is literally every word that can be supposed to apply to Shakspere. Greene proceeds to exhort his friends "to be employed in more profitable courses."—"Let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions."—"Seek you better masters." It is perfectly clear that these words refer only to the players generally ; and possibly, to the particular company of which Shakspere was a member. As such, and such only, must he take his share in the names which Greene applies to them, of "apes,"—"rude grooms,"—"buckram gentlemen,"—"peasants,"—and "painted monsters." It will be well to give the construction that has been put upon these words, in the form in which the "hypothesis" was first propounded by Malone :—

"Shakspeare having therefore, probably not long before the year 1592, when Greene wrote his dying exhortation to his friend, new-modelled and amplified these

two pieces (the two parts of the 'Contention'), and produced on the stage what in the folio edition of his works are called the Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI., and having acquired considerable reputation by them, Greene could not conceal the mortification that he felt at his own fame, and that of his associate, both of them old and admired playwrights, being eclipsed by a new *upstart* writer (for so he calls our great poet), who had then first perhaps attracted the notice of the public by exhibiting two plays, formed upon old dramas written by them, considerably enlarged and improved. He therefore in direct terms charges him with having acted like the crow in the fable, *beautified himself with their feathers;* in other words, with having acquired fame *furtivis coloribus,* by new-modelling a work originally produced by them: and wishing to depreciate our author, he very naturally quotes a line from one of the pieces which Shakspeare had thus *re-written,* a proceeding which the authors of the original plays considered as an invasion both of their literary property and character. This line, with many others, Shakspeare adopted without any alteration. The very term that Greene uses,—'to *bombast* out a blank-verse,'—exactly corresponds with what has been now suggested. This new poet, says he, knows as well as any man how to *amplify* and swell out a blank-verse. *Bumbast* was a soft stuff of a loose texture, by which garments were rendered more swelling and protruberant." *

Thus then, the starving and forsaken man—rejected by those who had been "beholding" to him; wanting the very bread of which he had been robbed, in the appropriation of his property by one of those who had rejected him; a man, too, prone to revenge, full of irascibility and self-love—contents himself with calling his plunderer "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers"—"A Johannes factotum"—"The only Shake-scene in the country." "He could not conceal his mortification!" It would have been miraculous if he could. And how does he exhibit it? He parodies a line from one of the productions of which he had been so plundered, to carry the point home—to leave no doubt as to the sting of his allusion. But, as has been most justly observed, the epigram would have wanted its sting if the line parodied had not been that of the very writer attacked.† Be this as it may, the dying man, for some cause or other, chose to veil his deep wrongs in a sarcastic allusion. He left the manuscript containing this allusion to be published by a friend; and it was so published. It was "a perilous shot out of an elder gun." But the matter did not stop here. The editor of the posthumous work actually apologised to the "upstart crow:"—"I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault, because myself hath seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes; besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art." ‡ This apology was not written by Chettle at some distant period; it came out in the same year with the pamphlet which contained the insult. The terms which he uses—"uprightness of dealing," and "facetious grace in writing"—seem as if meant distinctly to refute the vague accusation of "beautified with our feathers." It is perfectly clear that Chettle could not have used these terms if Shakspere had been the wholesale plunderer, either of Greene or of any other writer, that it is assumed he was by those who deprive him of the authorship of the two Parts of the "Contention." If he had been this plunderer, and if Chettle had basely

* Malone gives here a special application to the term *bombast*, as if it were meant to express the amplification of the old plays charged against Shakspere. The term had been used by Nashe five years before:—"Idiot art-masters, that intrude themselves to our ears as the alchymists of eloquence, who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbrave better pens with *the swelling bombast of bragging blank-verse*." (Epistle prefixed to Greene's "Menaphon," 1587.)

† "Edin. Review," July, 1840. ‡ Preface to "Kind-Harte's Dream."

apologised for a truth uttered by his dying friend, would the matter have rested there? Were there no Peeles, and Marlowes, and Nashes in the world, to proclaim the dishonour of the thief and the apologist?

There was an indistinct echo of Greene's complaint, by some "R. B." in 1594 :—

> "Greene gave the ground to all who wrote upon him.
> Nay, more; the men that so eclips'd his fame
> Purloin'd his plumes,—can they deny the same?"

We believe that there never yet appeared any great author in the world who was not reputed, in the onset of his career, to be a plagiarist; or any great literary performance produced by one whose reputation had to be made that was not held to be written by some one else than the man who did write it:—there was some one behind the curtain—some mysterious assistant—whose possible existence was a consolation to the envious and the malignant. Examples in our own day are common enough. "R. B." was probably one of these small critics. If he is held for any authority, we may set against him the indignant denial of Nashe that he had anything to do with "Greene's Groat's Worth of Wit," which he denounces as a "*scald, trivial, lying pamphlet.*" Nashe, be it remembered, was the friend and companion of the unfortunate Greene.

It appears to us that Greene, in his attack on the reputation of our great poet, has rendered to his memory the most essential service. He has fixed the date of the "Second Part of the Contention." However plausible may be the conjectures as to the early production of two or three of Shakspere's comedies, the "Romeo and Juliet," and even the first "Hamlet," there is no *positive* landmark on them for our direction. But in the case of the First Part of "Henry VI.," and the two Parts of the "Contention," we have the most unquestionable proof, in Greene's parody of a line from the Second Part (the third of the series), that they were popularly known in 1592. The three Parts are so dependent each upon the other, that the order of their production must have been the order of the historical events. They either belonged, therefore, to the first half of the decad between 1585 and 1595, or they touched very closely upon it. Important considerations with reference to Shakspere's share in the original building up of that mighty structure, the drama of Elizabeth, depend upon the establishment of this point, in connexion with the proof that these dramas were originally written by one poet—that the three Parts of "Henry VI," and the "Richard III." emanated from the same mind.

This is not the place for the examination of this question, which is purely critical. A full "Illustration" of the unity of these four dramas will be found in a subsequent volume.

It is highly probable that, when the First Part of "Henry VI." was originally produced, the stage had possession of a complete series of chronicle histories, rudely put together, aspiring to little poetical elevation, and managed pretty generally after the fashion described by Gosson, in a pamphlet against the stage printed about 1581 :—"If a true history be taken in hand, it is made like our shadows, longest at the rising and falling of the sun, shortest of all at high noon; for the poets drive it most commonly into such points as may best show the majesty of their pen in tragical speeches, or set the hearers agog with discourses of love, or paint a few antics to fit their own humours with scoffs and taunts, or bring in a show to furnish the stage when it is bare: when the matter of itself comes short of this, they follow the practice of a cobbler, and set their teeth to the leather to pull it out." The truth is, that up to the period when Shakspere reached the age of manhood, there were no artists in existence competent to produce an historical play superior to these rude performances. The state of the drama generally is thus succinctly, but most

correctly noticed by an anonymous writer:—"From the commencement of Shakspere's boyhood, till about the earliest date at which his removal to London can be possibly fixed, the drama lingered in the last stage of a semi-barbarism. Perhaps we do not possess any monument of the time except Whetstone's 'Promos and Cassandra;' but neither that play, nor any details that can be gathered respecting others, indicate the slightest advance beyond a point of development which had been reached many years before by such writers as Edwards and Gascoyne. About 1585, or Shakspere's twenty-first year, there opened a new era, which, before the same decad was closed, had given birth to a large number of dramas, many of them wonderful for the circumstances in which they rose, and several possessing real and absolute excellence."* Of the poets which belong to this remarkable decad, we possess undoubted specimens of the works of Lyly, Peele, Marlowe, Lodge, Greene, Kyd, and Nashe. There are one or two other inferior names, such as Chettle and Munday, connected with the latter part of this decad. We ourselves hold that Shakspere belongs to the first as well as to the second half of this short but most influential period of our literature. Of those artists to whom can be possibly imputed the composition of the First Part of "Henry VI.," there are only five in whom can be traced any supposed resemblance of style. They are—Peele, Marlowe, Greene, Lodge, and Kyd. The First Part of "Henry VI." was therefore either written by one of these five poets, or by some unknown author whose name has perished, or by Shakspere. We believe that it was written by Shakspere in his earliest connection with the dramatic art. We hold that the First Part of "Henry VI.," in all the essentials of its dramatic construction, is, with reference to the object which its author had in view of depicting a series of historical events with poetical truth, immeasurably superior to any other chronicle history which existed between 1585 and 1590. It has been called a "drum-and-trumpet thing." The age in which it was produced was one in which the most accomplished of its courtiers said, "I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet it is sung but by some blind crowder, with no rougher voice than rude style; which being so evil apparelled in the dust and cobweb of that uncivil age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar!"† He who made the "drum-and-trumpet thing" desired to move men's hearts as Sydney's was moved. He saw around him thousands who crowded to the theatres to witness the heroic deeds of their forefathers, although "evil apparelled in the dust and cobweb of that uncivil age;" and it was he who first seized upon the great theme for his own, and "trimmed" it in his own "gorgeous eloquence." And what, if the music which he first uttered had a savour of the rough voice and the rude style which had preceded him? What, if his unpractised hand sometimes struck the notes of timidity and unskilfulness? What, if he now and then hurried away even from the principles of his own art, and appeared to start at "sounds himself had made?" He did what no other man up to that day had done, and long after did,—he banished the "senseless and soulless shows" of the old historical drama, and at once raised up a stage "ample and true with life." To understand the value of the First Part of "Henry VI.," we must have a competent knowledge of the chronicle histories which had preceded it. We must also have a knowledge of the productions of those dramatists who were the contemporaries of Shakspere's first period. The dramatists are briefly indicated in another place.‡ We have something to add with reference to him who was unquestionably the next in intellectual rank to "the greatest in all literature." He alone makes any approach to the peculiar merits of the three dramas of "Henry VI.," in their original form.

* "Edin. Review," July 1840, p. 469. † Sir Philip Sydney's "Defence of Poetry."
‡ "Studies," Book I., Chap. VI.

It has long been the fashion to consider Marlowe as the precursor of Shakspere; to regard Marlowe as one of the founders of the regular drama, and Shakspere only as an improver. We may say a few words as to the external evidence for this belief, before we proceed to the internal evidences. Marlowe was killed in a wretched brawl on the 1st of June, 1593. He was then in his thirty-first year, being born in February, 1563-4. He was only two months older than Shakspere. We owe this discovery of Marlowe's age to the Rev. A. Dyce, whose labours in connection with the old Drama are so valuable and meritorious.* A native of Canterbury, he was educated at the King's School in that city; and was matriculated as a pensioner of Corpus-Christi College, Cambridge, in 1580-1. He took his degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1583; and that of Master of Arts in 1587. Phillips, in his "Theatrum Poetarum," thus speaks of him:—"Christopher Marlowe, a kind of a second Shakspere (whose contemporary he was), not only because like him he rose from an actor to be a maker of plays, though inferior both in fame and merit," &c. We have no distinct record of Marlowe as an actor. We know that he was early a maker of plays. He probably became a dramatic writer about the time he took his Master's degree in 1587. "Tamburlaine" is mentioned by Greene in 1588. But "Hamlet" is mentioned by Nashe in 1589, in his address prefixed to Greene's "Menaphon:"† "It is a common practice now-a-day, among a sort of shifting companions, that run through every art and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *Noverint*, whereto they were born, and busy themselves with the endeavours of art, that could scarcely latinize their neck-verse if they should have need; yet English Seneca, read by candlelight, yields many good sentences, as *Bloud is a Beggar*, and so forth: and, if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole '*Hamlets*,' I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches." This quotation is held to furnish the external evidence that Shakspere had been an attorney, by the connection here implied of "the trade of Noverint" and "whole Hamlets." Noverint was the technical beginning of a bond. It is imputed, then, by Nashe, to a sort of shifting companions, that, running through every art and thriving by none, they attempt dramatic composition, drawing their tragical speeches from English Seneca. Does this description apply to Shakspere? Was he thriving by no art? In 1589 he was established in life as a sharer in the Blackfriars' theatre. Does the use of the term "whole Hamlets" fix the allusion upon him? It appears to us only to show that some tragedy called "Hamlet," it may be Shakspere's, was then in existence; and that it was a play also at which Nashe might sneer as abounding with tragical speeches. But it does not seem to us that there is any absolute connection between the Noverint and the "Hamlet." Suppose, for example, that the "Hamlet" alluded to was written by Marlowe, who was educated at Cambridge, and was certainly not a lawyer's clerk. The sentence will read as well; the sarcasm upon the tragical speeches of the "Hamlet" will be as pointed; the shifting companion who has thriven by no art, and has left the calling to which he was born, may study English Seneca till he produces "whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches." In the same way Nashe might have said whole Tamburlaines of tragical speeches, without attempting to infer that the author of "Tamburlaine" had left the trade of Noverint. We believe that the allusion was to Shakspere's "Hamlet," but that the first part of

* "Some Account of Marlowe and his Writings;" in the Rev. A. Dyce's edition of Marlowe, 1850.

† The first recorded edition of Greene's "Menaphon" bears the date of 1589. Nashe in the introductory epistle promises a satirical work called "Anatomy of Absurdities," and in 1589 such a work appears. Mr. Dyce, however, fixes the date of the first edition of "Menaphon" as 1587; but he cites the title from the earliest edition he has met with, that of 1589. It would be satisfactory to know upon what authority an earlier date than that of 1589 is given to Nashe's edition.

the sentence had no allusion to Shakspere's occupation. The context of the passage renders the matter even clearer. Nashe begins,—"I will turn back to my first text of studies of delight, and talk a little in friendship with a few of our trivial translators." Nashe aspired to the reputation of a scholar; and he directs his satire against those who attempted the labours of scholarship without the requisite qualifications. The trivial translators could scarcely latinize their neck-verse—they could scarcely repeat the verse of Scripture which was the ancient form of praying the benefit of clergy. Seneca, however, might be read in English. We have then to ask was "Hamlet" a translation or an adaptation from Seneca? Did Shakspere ever attempt to found a play upon the model of Seneca; to be a trivial translator of him; even to transfuse his sentences into a dramatic composition? If this imputation does not hold good against Shakspere, the mention of "Hamlet" has no connection with the shifting companion who is thus talked to as a trivial translator. Nashe does not impute these qualities to "Hamlet," but to those who busy themselves with the endeavours of art in adapting sentences from Seneca which should rival whole "Hamlets" in tragical speeches. And then he immediately says, "But, O grief! Tempus edax rerum;—what is it that will last always? The sea exhaled by drops will in continuance be clay; and Seneca, let blood line by line, and page by page, at length must needs die to our stage." This is in some sort a digression; but it has reference to the exact period of which we are writing.

The young Shakspere and the young Marlowe were of the same age. What right have we to infer that the one could produce a "Tamburlaine" at the age of twenty-four, and the other not produce an imperfect outline of his own "Hamlet" at the same age, or even a year earlier? Malone connects the supposed date of Shakspere's commencement as a dramatic writer with the notice of him by some of his contemporaries. He passes over Nashe's "whole Hamlets;" he maintains that Spenser's description, in 1591, of the "gentle spirit," who

> "Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to mockery to sell."

applied not to Shakspere, but to Lyly, who was at that instant most active in "mockery;" but he fixes Shakspere with having *begun* to write in 1592, because Greene in that year sneers at him as "the only Shake-scene in a country." Does a young writer *suddenly* jump into the distinction of a sneer of envy from one much older in reputation, as Greene was? In an age when there were no newspapers and no reviews, it must be extremely difficult to trace the course of any man, however eminent, by the notices of the writers of his times. An author's fame, then, was not borne through every quarter of the land in the very hour in which it was won. More than all, the reputation of a dramatic writer could scarcely be known, except to a resident in London, until his works were committed to the press. The first play of Shakspere's (according to our belief) which was printed was The First Part of the Contention ("Henry VI.," Part II.), and that did not appear till 1594. Now, Malone says, "In Webbe's 'Discourse of English Poetry,' published in 1586, we meet with the names of most of the celebrated poets of that time; particularly those of George Whetstone and Anthony Munday, who were dramatic writers; but we find no trace of our author, or of any of his works." But Malone does not tell us that in Webbe's "Discourse of Poetry," we find the following passage:—"I am humbly to desire pardon of the learned company of gentlemen scholars, and students of the universities and inns of court, if I omit their several commendations in this place, which I know a great number of them have worthily deserved, in many rare devices and singular inventions of poetry: for neither hath it been my good hap to have seen all which I have heard of, neither is my abiding in such place where I can with facility get knowledge of their works."

"Three years afterwards," continues Malone, "Puttenham printed his 'Art of English Poesy;' and in that work also we look in vain for the name of Shakspeare." The book speaks of the one-and-thirty years' space of Elizabeth's reign; and thus puts the date of the writing a year earlier than the printing. But we here look in vain for some other illustrious names besides that of Shakspere. Malone has not told us that the *name* of Edmund Spenser is not found in Puttenham; nor, what is still more uncandid, that not one of Shakspere's early dramatic contemporaries is mentioned—neither Marlowe, nor Greene, nor Peele, nor Kyd, nor Lyly. The author evidently derives his knowledge of "poets and poesy" from a much earlier period than that in which he publishes. He does not mention Spenser by *name*, but he does "that other gentleman who wrote the late 'Shepherd's Calendar.'" The "Shepherd's Calendar" of Spenser was published in the year 1579.

Malone goes on to argue that the omission of Shakspere's name, or any notice of his works, in Sir John Harrington's "Apology of Poetry," printed in 1591, in which "he takes occasion to speak of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time," is a proof that none of Shakspere's dramatic compositions had then appeared. The reader will be in a better position to judge of the value of this argument by a reference to the passage of Sir John Harrington:—"For tragedies, to omit other famous tragedies, that, that was played at St. John's in Cambridge, of Richard III., would move, I think, Phalaris the tyrant, and terrify all tyrannous-minded men." [This was a Latin play, by Dr. Legge, acted some years before 1588.] "Then for comedies. How full of harmless mirth is our Cambridge 'Pedantius' and the Oxford 'Bellum Grammaticale!'" [Latin plays again.] "Or, to speak of a London comedy, how much good matter, yea, and matter of state, is there in that comedy called 'The Play of the Cards,' in which it is showed how four parasitical knaves robbed the four principal vocations of the realm; videl. the vocation of soldiers, scholars, merchants, and husbandmen! Of which comedy, I cannot forget the saying of a notable wise counsellor that is now dead, who, when some (to sing Placebo) advised that it should be forbidden, because it was somewhat too plain, and indeed as the old saying is (sooth boord is no boord), yet he would have it allowed, adding it was fit that they which do that they should not, should hear that they would not." Nothing, it will be seen, can be more exaggerated than Malone's statement, "He takes occasion to speak of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time." Does he mention "Tamburlaine," or "Faustus," or "The Massacre of Paris," or "The Jew of Malta?" As he does not, it may be assumed with equal justice that none of these plays of Marlowe had appeared in 1591; and yet we know that he died in 1593. So of Lyly's "Galathea," "Alexander and Campaspe," "Endymion," &c. So of Greene's "Orlando and Furioso," "Friar Bacon," "James IV." So of the "Spanish Tragedy" of Kyd. The truth is, that Harrington in his notice of celebrated dramas was even more antiquated than Puttenham; and his evidence, therefore, in this matter, is utterly worthless.

But Malone has given his crowning proof that Shakspere had not written before 1591, in the following words:—"Sir Philip Sydney, in his 'Defence of Poesie,' speaks at some length of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise, but has not the slightest allusion to Shakspeare, whose plays, had they then appeared, would doubtless have rescued the English stage from the contempt which is thrown upon it by the accomplished writer; and to which it was justly exposed by the wretched compositions of those who preceded our poet. 'The Defence of Poesie' was not published till 1595, but must have been written some years before." There is one slight objection to this argument: Sir Philip Sydney was killed at the battle of Zutphen, in the year 1586; and it would really have been somewhat surprising if the illustrious author of the "Defence of Poesy" could have included

Shakspere in his account "of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise," which was in effect a reply to "The School of Abuse" of Gosson, and to other controversialists of the puritanical faction, who were loudest about 1580. At that time Shakspere was sixteen years of age.

The earliest example of the application of blank-verse to the drama is exhibited in "Ferrex and Porrex," (usually called "Gorboduc,") written by Sackville and Norton, and acted in the Inner Temple, and before the queen, in 1561. A surreptitious copy of this play was published in 1565; and a genuine edition appeared in 1571. Gascoyne's "Jocasta," played at Gray's Inn in 1566, was also in blank-verse. Whetstone's "Promos and Cassandra," printed in 1578, but not previously acted, was partially in blank-verse. Hughes's "Misfortunes of Arthur," in blank-verse, was acted before the queen in 1587 at Greenwich. The plays *publicly* acted subsequent to these performances, and up to 1587,—when Nashe, in a passage we have quoted, talks of the "swelling bombast of bragging blank-verse,"—are held by Mr. Collier either to have been written in prose or in rhyming verse. Mr. Collier therefore maintains that the establishment of blank-verse upon the *public* stage was a great and original effort; and he gives the praise of effecting this revolution to Christopher Marlowe. "Tamburlaine," which he holds to be Marlowe's work, was, he affirms, the first example of a play in blank-verse so acted. Mr. Collier says, "To adduce 'Tamburlaine' as our earliest popular dramatic composition in blank-verse is to present it in an entirely new light, most important in considering the question of its merits and its defects." Again: "Marlowe did not 'set the end of scholarism in an English blank-verse;'* but he thought that the substitution of blank-verse for rhyme would be a most valuable improvement in our drama." Now, we honestly confess, admitting that "Marlowe was our first poet who used blank-verse in compositions performed in public theatres," (and the question is not one which we are called upon here to examine,) we cannot appreciate the amount of the merit which Mr. Collier thus claims for Marlowe. "Ferrex and Porrex" had been acted, more than once, before numerous spectators; and it was in existence, in the printed form in which it was accessible to all men, sixteen years before Marlowe is supposed to have effected this improvement. It was not an obscure or a contemptible performance. Sydney describes it as "full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style." At any rate, here was dramatic blank-verse; monotonous indeed, not informed with any bold or creative spirit of poetry, coldly correct, and tediously didactic; but still blank-verse, constructed upon a principle that was imitated by all the early dramatists, till some master arose who broke up its uniformity, and refined the "drumming decasyllabon"† with variety of measure and of pause. Where was the remarkable merit of introducing the blank-verse of Sackville to the *public* stage? If "Ferrex and Porrex" had not been printed,—if "Promos and Cassandra" had not been printed,—if, being known to a few, their memory had perished—the man who first introduced blank-verse into a popular play might have been held in some sense to have been an inventor. But the public stage had not received the dramatic blank-verse with which every scholar must have been familiar, from one very obvious circumstance,—the rudeness of its exhibitions did not require the aid of the poet, or at least required only the aid which he could afford with extreme facility. The stage had its extemporal actors, its ready constructors of dull and pointless prose, and its manufacturers of doggrel which exhibited nothing of poetry but its fetters. Greene himself, who is not to be confounded with the tribe of low writers for the theatre in its earliest transition-state, says, in 1588, that he still maintains his "*old* course to palter up something in prose." He is as indignant as his friend Nashe against "verses jet on the stage

* Greene, in 1588. † Nashe, 1587.

in tragical buskins, every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow-bell." This, Mr. Collier says, is pointed at Marlowe. Greene is no doubt sarcastic upon some one who had made mouthing verses, whilst he continued to write prose. Marlowe, very probably, had first made a species of verse popular which Greene had not practised, and which, he says, he was twitted with being unable to produce.

It was commendable in any man to adopt an essentially higher style than that with which the stage had been familiar; but it certainly required no great effort in a poet to transfer the style which had been popular in the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn to Blackfriars and the Curtain. The cases appear to us parallel with many cases of publication in another form. The style which was first made popular by Beppo, for example, was previously presented to the English taste in Whistlecraft; but because Whistlecraft was known to a few, whilst Beppo was read by thousands, shall we say that Byron first thought the introduction of the style of Berni would be a most valuable improvement in our poetry? With the highest respect for Mr. Collier's opinions, it appears to us that the reputation of Marlowe must rest, not upon his popular revival of dramatic blank-verse, if he did so revive it, but upon the extent to which he improved the model which was ready to his hand. And here we cannot help thinking that the invective both of Nashe and Greene is not directed so much against the popular introduction of blank-verse, as against a particular species of blank-verse whose very defects had perhaps contributed to its popularity. Nashe bestows his satire upon "vain-glorious tragedians, who contend not so seriously to excel in action as to embowel the clouds in a speech of comparison;"—art-masters, who "think to outbrave better pens with a swelling bombast," &c.;—"being not extemporal in the invention of any other means to vent their manhood." Greene, on the other hand, is one "whose extemporal vein in any humour will excel our greatest art-masters' deliberate thoughts." Greene himself, although he derides those "who set the end of scholarism in an English blank-verse," points especially at verse where he finds "every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow-bell;" and, he adds, "daring God out of heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine." Mr. Collier has proved, very conclusively, that Marlowe was the author of "Tamburlaine;" and there can be no doubt that much of the invective of Nashe and Greene may justly apply to this performance. Its very defects Mr. Collier ascribes to the circumstances under which it was written:—"We may assert that, when writing 'Tamburlaine,' Marlowe contemplated a most important change and improvement in English dramatic poetry. Until it appeared, *plays upon the public stage* were written, sometimes in prose, but most commonly in rhyme; and the object of Marlowe was to substitute blank-verse. His genius was daring and original: he felt that prose was heavy and unattractive, and rhyme unnatural and wearisome; and he determined to make a bold effort, to the success of which we know not how much to attribute of the after-excellence of even Shakespeare himself. . . . . Marlowe had a purpose to accomplish; he had undertaken to wean the multitude from the 'jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits,' which, according to Gosson, were so attractive; and in order to accomplish this object it was necessary to give something in exchange for what he took away. Hence the 'swelling bombast' of the style in which much of the two Parts of 'Tamburlaine the Great' is written." Be this as it may, we greatly doubt whether, if Shakspere had followed in the steps of "Tamburlaine," his "after-excellence" would have been so rapidly matured. It was when he rejected this model, if he ever followed it, that he moved onward with freedom to his own surpassing glory.

The plays that can be unhesitatingly assigned to Marlowe are,—the two Parts of "Tamburlaine," the "Massacre of Paris," "Faustus," "The Jew of Malta," and "Edward II." There can be no doubt, whatever be the defects of these perform-

ances, that they are the work of a very remarkable man,—one that stood apart from the mass of his contemporaries to impress the peculiarities of his genius upon everything he touched. It is impossible to open "Tamburlaine," at any page, without feeling that we have lighted upon a work of power. We encounter perpetual instances of the most extravagant taste; the inflated style invades, without intermission, the debateable ground between the sublime and the ridiculous; the characters are destitute of interest, with the exception of the gorgeous savage who perpetually fills the scene; we look in vain for the slightest approach to simplicity. But still we are not wearied with the feeble platitudes that belong to the herd of imitators. The wild magnificence, the unbridled passion, the fierceness of love or hatred, the revelling in blood and cruelty without fear or remorse, the pride in being accounted a scourge of God—these attributes of the character of Tamburlaine were precisely suited to the power which Marlowe possessed for their development. In the furnace of his imagination not only the images and figurative allusions, but the whole material of his poetry,—the action, the characterization, and the style,—became all of the same white heat. Everything in "Tamburlaine" burns. The characters walk about like the damned in "Vathek," with hearts of real fire in their bosoms. They speak in language such as no human beings actually employ,—not because they are Orientals, but because they are not men and women. They look to us as things apart from this earth,—not because they are clothed in "barbaric pearl and gold," but because their feelings are not our feelings, and their thoughts not our thoughts. The queen of the hero is dying in his presence: though he tied kings to his chariot-wheels, and scourged them with whips, he is represented as accessible to the softer emotions; and the lover thus pours forth his lament:—

"Proud fury, and intolerable fit,
That dares torment the body of my love,
And scourge the scourge of the immortal God:
Now are those spheres, where Cupid us'd to sit,
Wounding the world with wonder and with love,
Sadly supplied with pale and ghastly death,
Whose darts do pierce the centre of my soul.
Her sacred beauty hath enchanted heaven;
And had she liv'd before the siege of Troy,
Helen, (whose beauty summon'd Greece to arms,
And drew a thousand ships to Tenedos,)
Had not been nam'd in Homer's Iliads;
Her name had been in ev'ry line he wrote.
Or had those wanton poets, for whose birth
Old Rome was proud, but gaz'd awhile on her,
Nor Lesbia nor Corinna had been nam'd;
Zenocrate had been the argument
Of ev'ry epigram or elegy.

[*The Music sounds.* ZENOCRATE *dies.*

What! is she dead? Techelles, draw thy sword
And wound the earth, that it may cleave in twain,
And we descend into th' infernal vaults,
To hale the fatal sisters by the hair,
And throw them in the triple moat of hell,
For taking hence my fair Zenocrate.
Casane and Theridamas, to arms!
Raise cavalieros higher than the clouds,
And with the cannon break the frame of heav'n;
Batter the shining palace of the sun,
And shiver all the starry firmament,
For am'rous Jove hath snatch'd my love from hence,
Meaning to make her stately queen of heaven.
What God soever hold thee in his arms,

Giving thee nectar and ambrosia,
Behold me here, divine Zenocrate,
Raving, impatient, desperate, and mad,
Breaking my steeled lance, with which I burst
The rusty beams of Janus' temple-doors,
Letting out death and tyrannizing war,
To march with me under this bloody flag!
And if thou pitiest Tamburlaine the Great,
Come down from heav'n and live with me again."

"The Massacre of Paris," which Mr. Collier thinks "was produced soon after 1588," is essentially without dramatic interest. It was a subject in which Marlowe would naturally revel; for in the progress of the action blood could be made to flow as freely as water. Charles Lamb wittily says, "*Blood* is made as light of in some of these old dramas as *money* in a modern sentimental comedy; and as *this* is given away till it reminds us that it is nothing but counters, so *that* is spilt till it affects us no more than its representative, the paint of the property-man in the theatre." Unquestionably this was a characteristic of the transition state of the drama; and "Titus Andronicus" is a memorable example of it. But Marlowe, especially, revels in these exhibitions; and in the "Jew of Malta" the passion is carried to the verge of the ludicrous. The effect intended to be produced is, of course, utterly defeated by these wholesale displays of brutality. As we pity the "one solitary captive," so we weep over the one victim of another's passions; but the revenge of Barabas, the poisoning not only of his own daughter but of the entire nunnery in which she had taken refuge, the massacres, the treacheries, the burning caldron that he had intended for a whole garrison, and into which he is himself plunged,—tragedy such as this is simply revolting. The characters of Barabas and of his servant, and the motives by which they are stimulated, are the mere coinage of extravagance; and the effect is as essentially undramatic as the personification is unreal.

"Faustus" is of a higher cast than the "Jew of Malta," although it was probably written before it. Mr. Collier conceives that "Faustus" was intended to follow up "Tamburlaine;" while he assigns the "Jew" to 1589 or 1590. Its great merit lies in the conception of the principal character. It is undramatic in the general progress of the action; full of dark subtleties, that rather reveal the condition of Marlowe's own mind than lead to the popular appreciation of the character which he painted; and the comedy with which it is blended is perfectly out of keeping, neither harmonising with the principal action, nor relieving it by contrast. But still there is wonderful power. It is, however, essentially the power of Marlowe, to whom it was not given, as to the "myriad-minded man," to go out of himself to realise the truth of every form of human thought and passion, and even to make the supernatural a reality. It was for Marlowe to put his own habits of mind into his dramatic creations; to grapple with terrors that would be revolting to a well-disciplined understanding; "to wander in fields where curiosity is forbidden to go; to approach the dark gulf near enough to look in; to be busied in speculations which are the rottenest part of the core of the fruit that fell from the tree of knowledge."* It is in this spirit, Lamb holds, that he dealt with the characters of Barabas and Faustus. May we not add that when he worked upon a new model,—when he produced his "Edward II.," in all probability his latest play,—he could not even then avoid exposing "a mind which at least delighted to dabble with interdicted subjects?" The character of Gaveston is certainly not drawn as Shakspere would have drawn it: if there had been a necessity for so treating the subject, *he* would have abandoned it altogether.

* Lamb's "Specimens," vol. i., page 44.

Within a year or two of his death the genius of Marlowe was thus revelling in the exercise of its own peculiar qualities; displaying alike its strength and its weakness, its refinement and its grossness. In his latest period he produced the "Edward II." Mr. Collier mentions this as "if not the last, certainly one of the most perfect, of Marlowe's productions. . . . . Here the author's versification is exhibited in its greatest excellence." It was entered at Stationers' Hall in July 1593, the unhappy poet having been killed in the previous month. We presume, therefore, that those who hold that Marlowe wrote the two Parts of the "Contention between the Houses of York and Lancaster"—the two *old* plays upon which they say Shakspere founded the Second and Third Parts of "Henry VI."—also hold that they were written before Marlowe's "Edward II." Chalmers was the first to broach the theory of Marlowe's authorship of these plays. Malone, as we have seen, propounded, with minute circumstantiality, in his "Dissertation," how Greene "could not conceal his mortification" that he and Peele had been robbed of their property by a "new upstart writer." But Malone, in his "Chronological Order," arraigns the thief under an entirely new indictment. Some circumstances, he says, which have lately struck him, confirm an opinion that Marlowe was the author. And he then goes on to produce "confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ." "A passage in his (Marlowe's) historical drama of 'King Edward II.,' which Dr. Farmer has pointed out to me since the 'Dissertation' was printed, also inclines me to believe, with him, that Marlowe was the author of one, if not both, of the old dramas on which Shakspeare formed the two plays which in the first folio edition of his works are distinguished by the titles of 'The Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI.'" The passage which produced this recantation of Malone's former opinion is that of the two celebrated lines in the Second Part of the "Contention:"

> "What, will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
> Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted."

Mark the proof. "Marlowe, as Dr. Farmer observes to me, has the very same phraseology in 'King Edward II.:'—

> "'Scorning that the lowly *earth*
> *Should drink his blood, mounts up to the air.*'

"And in the same play I have lately noticed another line in which we find the very epithet here applied to the pious Lancastrian king:—

> "'Frown'st thou thereat, *aspiring Lancaster?*'"

The Rev. A. Dyce has adopted the same opinion. "To the first Part of the 'Contention' and to 'The True Tragedy' (second part), Greene may have contributed his share; so also may Lodge, and so may Peele have done; but in both pieces there are scenes characterised by a vigour of conception and expression, to which, as their undisputed works demonstratively prove, neither Greene, nor Lodge, nor Peele could possibly have risen. Surely, therefore, we have full warrant for supposing that Marlowe was largely concerned in the composition of the first Part of the 'Contention,' and the 'True Tragedy.'"*

The theory that Marlowe wrote one or both Parts of the "Contention" must begin by assuming that his mind was so thoroughly disciplined at the period when he produced "Tamburlaine," and "Faustus," and the "Jew of Malta," that he was able to lay aside every element, whether of thought or expression, by which those

* "Some Account of Marlowe and his Writings."

plays are characterised; adopt essentially different principles for the dramatic conduct of a story; copy his characters from living and breathing models of actual man; come down from his pomp and extravagance of language, not to reject poetry, but to ally poetry with familiar and natural thoughts; and delineate crime, not with the glaring and fantastic pencil that makes demons spout forth fire and blood in the midst of thick darkness, but with a severe portraiture of men who walk in broad daylight upon the common earth, rendering the ordinary passions of their fellows—pride, and envy, and ambition, and revenge—most fearful, from their alliance with stupendous intellect and unconquerable energy. This was what Marlowe must have done before he could have conducted a single sustained scene of either Part of the "Contention;"—before he could have depicted the fierce hatreds of Beaufort and Gloster, the never-subdued ambition of Margaret and York, the patient suffering amidst taunting friends and reviling enemies of Henry, and, above all, the courage, the activity, the tenacity, the self-possession, the intellectual supremacy, and the passionless ferocity, of Richard. In the "Tamburlaine," and "Jew," and "Faustus," events move on with no natural progression. In every scene there must be something to excite. We have no repose; for, if striking situations are not presented, we have the same exaggerations of thought, and the same extravagance of language. What is intended to be familiar at once plunges into the opposite extravagance of ribaldry; and even the messengers and servants are made out of something different from life. We have looked through Marlowe's plays—those which are unquestionably of an earlier date than his "Edward II."—for a plain piece of narrative, such as might contrast with the easy method with which Shakspere in general tells a story, and of which the "Contention" furnishes abundant examples: but we have looked in vain. On the other hand, innumerable passages may be found in Marlowe's "Edward II." in which his peculiar characteristics continue to prevail, but associated with many evidences of a really higher style of dramatic poetry. This is decisive, we think, against Marlowe being the author of the "Contention." But it proves something more;—it is evidence that he had become acquainted with another model, and that model we hold to be the "Contention" itself. Here it stands, with a fixed date; in itself a model, we believe, if no other works of Shakspere can be proved to have existed in, or close upon, the first half of the decad commencing in 1585. To show the contrary it would be necessary to maintain that Marlowe's "Edward II." preceded the "Contention;" but upon this point no one has ever raised a doubt. All the English authorities have left the "Contention" amidst the dust and rubbish of that drama, which Marlowe *first*, and Shakspere afterwards, according to their theory, came to inform with life and poetry. They have always proclaimed these dramas as *old* plays—rude plays—things which Shakspere remodelled. We hold that they were the things upon which Marlowe built his later style, whether as regards the dramatic conduct of an action, the development of character, or the structure of the verse;—and we hold that they were Shakspere's.

But there is one point which those who deny Shakspere the authorship of the two Parts of the "Contention" altogether pass over. They know that the wonderful comedy of the Jack Cade scenes of the second Part of "Henry VI." is, with scarcely any change, to be found in the play which they say Shakspere did not write. But according to the theory of Malone, and Collier, and Dyce, and Hunter, there was "some author who preceded Shakspeare" who may justly claim the merit of having given birth in England to the very highest comedy—not the mere comedy of manners, not the comedy of imitation, but that comedy which, having its roots imbedded in the most profound philosophy, is still as fresh as at the hour when it was first written, and will endure through every change in the outward forms of social life. For what is the comedy which is here before us, written, as it would

seem, by "some author who preceded Shakspeare?" Is it the comedy of Marlowe? or of Greene? or of Peele? or of the latter two?—or of Lodge, who wrote in conjunction with Greene?—or of Lyly?—or Kyd?—or Nashe?—or is it to be traced to some anonymous author, such as he who produced "The Famous Victories?" We are utterly at a loss where to assign the authorship of such comedy upon this theory. We turn to the works of the authors who preceded Shakspere, and we find abundance indeed of low buffoonery, but scarcely a spark of that universal wit and humour which, all things considered, is the very rarest amongst the gifts of genius. Those who are familiar with the works of the earliest English dramatists will know that our assertion is not made at random. We believe that the man, to use the words of our valued friend, Mr. Craik, "who first informed our drama with true wit and humour" was the only man of whose existence we have any record who could have written the Jack Cade scenes of the "Contention."

If Shakspere had done to these remarkable dramas what it is the fashion to assert that he did,—new-versify, new-model, transpose, amplify, improve, and polish,—he would still have been essentially a dishonest plagiarist. We have no hesitation in stating our belief that the two Parts of the "Contention" are immeasurably superior, in the dramatic conduct of the story, the force and consistency of character, the energy of language, yea, and even harmony of versification, to any dramatic production whatever which existed in the year 1591. We hold that whoever obtained possession, legally or otherwise, of the property of these productions (meaning by property the purchased right of exhibiting them on the stage), and applied himself to their amplification and improvement to the extent, and with the success, which is represented, was, to say the best of him, a presumptuous and self-sufficient meddler. We hold that it was utterly impossible that Shakspere should have set about such a work at all, having any consciousness of his own original power. We further hold, that the only consistent theory that can be maintained with regard to the amplifications and improvements upon the original work must be founded upon the belief that the work in its first form was Shakspere's own. "He new-modelled," says Malone. This is a phrase of large acceptation. We can understand how Shakspere new-modelled the old "Taming of a Shrew," and the old "King John," by completely re-writing all the parts, adding some characters, rejecting others, rendering the action at his pleasure more simple or more complex, expanding a short exclamation into a long and brilliant dialogue, or condensing a whole scene into some expressive speech or two. This, to our minds, is a sort of remodelling which Shakspere did not disdain to try his hand upon. But the remodelling which consists in the addition of lines here and there,—in the expansion of a sentiment already expressed,—in the substitution of a forcible line for a weak one, or a rhythmical line for one less harmonious,—in the change of an epithet or the inversion of two epithets,—and this without the slightest change in the dramatic conception of the original, whether as to the action as a whole, or the progress of the action,—or the characterization as a whole, or the small details of character;—remodelling such as this, to be called the work of Shakspere, and the only work upon which he exercised his hand in these dramas, appears to us to assume that he stood in the same relation to the original author of these pieces as the mechanic who chisels a statue does to the artist who conceives and perfects its design.

[Funeral of Sydney.]

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIGHTY HEART.

In the spring of 1588, and through the summer also, we may well believe that Shakspere abided in London. The course of public events was such that he would scarcely have left the capital, even for a few weeks. For the hearts of all men in the vast city were mightily stirred; and whilst in that "shop of war" might be heard on every side the din of "anvils and hammers waking to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice,"* the poet had his own work to do, in urging forward the noble impulse through which the people, of whatever sect, or whatever party, willed that they would be free. It was the year of the Armada.

* Milton: "Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing."

When Shakspere first exchanged the quiet intercourse of his native town for the fierce contests of opinion amongst the partisans of London—he must have had fears for his country. A conspiracy, the most daring and extensive, had burst out against the life of the Queen; and it was the more dangerous that the leaders of the plot were high-minded enthusiasts, who mingled with their traitorous designs the most chivalrous devotion to another Queen, a long-suffering prisoner. The horrible cruelties that attended the execution of Babington and his accomplices aggravated the pity which men felt that so much enthusiasm should have been lost to their country. More astounding events were to follow. In a year of dearth the citizens had banqueted, amidst bells and bonfires, in honour of the detection of Babington and his followers; and now, within three weeks of the feast of Christmas, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, assisted with divers earls, barons, and gentlemen of account, and worshipful citizens "in coats of velvet and chains of gold, all on horseback, in most solemn and stately manner, by sound of four trumpets, about ten of the clock in the forenoon, made open and public proclamation and declaration of the sentence lately given by the nobility against the Queen of Scots under the great seal of England."* At the Cross in Cheap, or at the end of Chancery Lane, or at St. Magnus' Corner near London Bridge, would the young sojourner in this seat of policy hear the proclamation; and he would hear also the "great and wonderful rejoicing of the people of all sorts, as manifestly appeared by ringing of bells, making of bonfires, and singing of psalms in every of the streets and lanes of the City."† But amidst this show of somewhat ferocious joy would he encounter gloomy and fear-stricken faces. Men would not dare even to whisper their opinions, but it would be manifest that the public heart was not wholly at ease. On the eighth of February the Queen of Scots is executed. Within a week after London pours forth its multitudes to witness a magnificent and a mournful pageant. The Queen has taken upon herself the cost of the public funeral of Sir Philip Sydney. She has done wisely in this. In honouring the memory of the most gallant and accomplished of her subjects, she diverts the popular mind from unquiet reflections to feelings in which all can sympathise. Even the humblest of the people, who know little of the poetical genius, the taste, the courtesy, the chivalrous bearing of this star of the Court of Elizabeth, know that a young and brave man has fallen in the service of his country. Some of his companions in arms have perhaps told the story of his giving the cup of water, about to be lifted to his own parched lips, to the dying soldier whose necessities were greater than his. And that story indeed would move their tears, far more than all the gallant recollections of the tilt-yard. From the Minorites at the eastern extremity of the City, to St. Paul's, there is a vast procession of authorities in solemn purple; bnt more impressive is the long column of "certain young men of the City, marching by three and three in black cassokins, with their short pikes, halberds, and ensign trailing on the ground." There are in that procession many of the "officers of his foot in the Low Countries," his "gentlemen and yeomen-servants," and twelve "knights of his kindred and friends." One there is amongst them upon whom all eyes are gazing—Drake, the bold seaman, who has carried the terror of the English flag through every sea, and in a few months will be "singeing the King of Spain's beard." The corpse of Sydney is borne by fourteen of his yeomen; and amongst the pall-bearers is one weeping manly tears, Fulke Greville, upon whose own tomb was written as the climax of his honour that he was "friend to Sir Philip Sydney." The uncle of the dead hero is there also, the proud, ambitious, weak, and incapable Leicester, who has been kinging it as Governor-General of the Low Coutries, without the courage to fight a battle, except that in which Sydney was sacrificed. He has been recalled; and is in some disfavour in the courtly circle,

* Stow's "Annals." † Ibid.

although he tried to redeem his disgraces in the Netherlands by boldly counselling the poisoning of the Queen of Scots. Shakspere may have looked upon the haughty peer, and shuddered when he thought of the murderer of Edward Arden.*

Within a year of the burial of Sydney the popular temper had greatly changed. It had gone forth to all lands that England was to be invaded. Philip of Spain was preparing the greatest armament that the combined navies of Spain and Portugal, of Naples and Sicily, of Genoa and Venice, could bear across the seas, to crush the arch-heretic of England. Rome had blessed the enterprise. Prophecies had been heard in divers languages, that the year 1588 "should be most fatal and ominous unto all estates," and it was "now plainly discovered that England was the main subject of that time's operation."† Yet England did not quail. "The whole commonalty," says the annalist, "became of one heart and mind." The Council of War demanded five thousand men and fifteen ships of the City of London. Two

[Camp at Tilbury.]

days were craved for answer; and the City replied that ten thousand men and thirty ships were at the service of their country.‡ In every field around the capital were the citizens who had taken arms practising the usual points of war. The Camp at Tilbury was formed. "It was a pleasant sight to behold the soldiers,

* See page 55. † Stow's "Annals."

‡ It has been said, in contradiction to the good old historian of London, that the City only gave what the Council demanded; 10,000 men were certainly levied in the twenty-five wards.

as they marched towards Tilbury, their cheerful countenances, courageous words and gestures, dancing and leaping wheresoevor they came; and in the camp their most felicity was hope of fight with the enemy: where ofttimes divers rumours ran of their foes approach, and that present battle would be given them; then were they joyful at such news, as if lusty giants were to run a race." There is another description of an eager and confident army that may parallel this:—

"All furnish'd, all in arms:
All plum'd, like estridges that with the wind
Bated,—like eagles having lately bath'd;
Glittering in golden coats, like images;
As full of spirit as the month of May,
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer:
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls."*

He who wrote this description had, we think, looked upon the patriot trainbands of London in 1588. But, if we mistake not, he had given an impulse to the spirit which had called forth this "strong and mighty preparation," in a voice as trumpet-tongued as the proclamations of Elizabeth. The chronology of Shakspere's King John is amongst the many doubtful points of his literary career. The authorship of the "King John" in two Parts is equally doubtful. But if that be an older play than Shakspere's and be not, as the Germans believe with some reason, written by Shakspere himself, the drama which we receive as his is a work peculiarly fitted for the year of the great Armada. The other play is full of matter that would have offended the votaries of the old religion. This, in a wise spirit of toleration, attacks no large classes of men—excites no prejudices against friars and nuns, but vindicates the independence of England against the interference of the papal authority, and earnestly exhorts her to be true to herself. This was the spirit in which even the undoubted adherents of the ancient forms of religion acted while England lay under the ban of Rome in 1588. The passages in Shakspere's "King John" appear to us to have even a more pregnant meaning, when they are connected with that stirring time:—

"*K. John.* What earthly name to interrogatories
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?
Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
Tell him this tale; and from the month of England
Add thus much more,—that no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
But as we under Heaven are supreme head,
So under Him, that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:
So tell the pope; all reverence set apart,
To him, and his usurp'd authority.
K. Phil. Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.
K. John. Though you, and all the kings of Christendom,
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;
And, by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,
Who, in that sale, sells pardon from himself;
Though you, and all the rest, so grossly led,
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish;

* "Henry IV.," Part I., Act IV., Scene I.

Yet I, alone, alone do me oppose
Against the pope, and count his friends my foes.

. . . . .

K. John. The legate of the pope hath been with me,
And I have made a happy peace with him;
And he hath promis'd to dismiss the powers
Led by the dauphin.
Bast. O inglorious league!
Shall we, upon the footing of our land,
Send fair-play orders, and make compromise,
Insinuation, parley, and base truce,
To arms invasive?

. . . . .

This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them: Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true."

The patriotism of Shakspere is less displayed in set speeches than in the whole life of historical plays—incident and character. Out of inferior writers might be collected more laudatory sentences flattering to national pride; but his words are bright and momentary as the spark which fires the mine. The feeling is in the audience, and he causes it to burst out in shouts or tears. He learnt the management of this power, we think, during the excitement of the great year of 1588.

The Armada is scattered. England's gallant sons have done their work; the winds, which a greater Power than that of sovereigns and councils holds in His hand, have been let loose. The praise is to Him. Again a mighty procession is on the way to St. Paul's. The banners taken from the Spanish ships are hung out on the battlements of the cathedral; and now, surrounded by all the nobles and mighty men who have fought her battles, the Queen descends from her "chariot throne" to make her "hearty prayers on her bended knees." Leicester, the favourite to whose weak hand was nominally intrusted the command of the troops, has not lived to see this triumph. But Essex, the new favourite, would be there; and Hunsdon, the General for the Queen. There too would be Raleigh, and Hawkins, and Frobisher, and Drake, and Howard of Effingham—one who forgot all distinctions of sect in the common danger of his country. Well might the young poet thus apostrophize this country!—

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress, built by Nature for herself,
Against infestion and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

But, glorious as was the contemplation of the attitude of England during the year of the Armada, the very energy that had called forth this noble display of patriotic spirit exhibited itself in domestic controversy when the pressure

from without was removed. The poet might then, indeed, qualify his former admiration:—

> "O England! model to thy inward greatness,
> Like little body with a mighty heart,
> What mightst thou do that honour would thee do,
> Were all thy children kind and natural!"

The same season that witnessed the utter destruction of the armament of Spain saw London excited to the pitch of fury by polemical disputes. It was not now the quarrel between Protestant and Romanist, but between the National Church and Puritanism. The theatres, those new and powerful teachers, lent themselves to the controversy. In some of these their license to entertain the people was abused by the introduction of matters connected with religion and politics; so that in 1589 Lord Burghley not only directed the Lord Mayor to inquire what companies of players had offended, but a commission was appointed for the same purpose. How Shakspere's company proceeded during this inquiry has been made out most clearly by a valuable document discovered at Bridgewater House, by Mr. Collier, wherein they disclaim to have conducted themselves amiss. "These are to certify your right Honourable Lordships that her Majesty's poor players, James Burbage, Richard Burbage, John Laneham, Thomas Greene, Robert Wilson, John Taylor, Anth. Wadeson, Thomas Pope, George Peele, Augustine Phillipps, Nicholas Towley, William Shakespeare, William Kempe, William Johnson, Baptiste Goodale, and Robert Armyn, being all of them sharers in the Blackfriars playhouse, have never given cause of displeasure, in that they have brought into their plays matters of state and religion, unfit to be handled by them or to be presented before lewd spectators: neither hath any complaint in that kind ever been preferred against them or any of them. Wherefore they trust most humbly in your Lordships' consideration of their former good behaviour, being at all times ready and willing to yield obedience to any command whatsoever your Lordships in your wisdom may think in such case meet," &c.

"Nov. 1589."

In this petition, Shakspere, a sharer in the theatre, but with others below him in the list, says, and they all say, that "they have never brought into their plays matters of state and religion." The public mind in 1589-90 was furiously agitated by "matters of state and religion." A controversy was going on which is now known as that of *Martin Marprelate*, in which the constitution and discipline of the Church were most furiously attacked in a succession of pamphlets; and they were defended with equal violence and scurrility. Izaak Walton says,—"There was not only one Martin Marprelate, but other venomous books daily printed and dispersed,—books that were so absurd and scurrilous, that the graver divines disdained them an answer." Walton adds,—"And yet these were grown into high esteem with the common people, till Tom Nashe appeared against them all, who was a man of a sharp wit, and the master of a scoffing, satirical, merry pen." Connected with this controversy, there was subsequently a more personal one between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey; but they were each engaged in the Marprelate dispute. John Lyly was the author of one of the most remarkable pamphlets produced on this occasion, called "Pap with a Hatchet." Harvey, it must be observed, was the intimate friend of Spenser; and in a pamphlet which he dates from Trinity Hall, November 5, 1589, he thus attacks the author of "Pap with a Hatchet," the more celebrated Euphuist, whom Sir Walter Scott's novel has made familiar to us:—

"I am threatened with a bable, and Martin menaced with a comedy—a fit motion for a jester and a player to try what may be done by employment of his faculty.

Bables and comedies are parlous fellows to decipher and discourage men (that is the point) with their witty flouts and learned jerks, enough to lash any man out of countenance. Nay, if you shake the painted scabbard at me, I have done; and all you that tender the preservation of your good names were best to please Pap-Hatched, and fee Euphues betimes, for fear lest he be moved, or some one of his apes hired, to make a play of you, and then is your credit quite undone for ever and ever. Such is the public reputation of their plays, he must needs be discouraged whom they decipher. Better anger an hundred other than two such that have the stage at commandment, and can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure."*

We thus see that Harvey, the friend of Spenser, is threatened by one of those who "have the stage at commandment" with having a play made of him. Such plays were made in 1589, and Nashe thus boasts of them in one of his tracts printed in 1589:—"Methought *Vetus Comœdia* began to prick him at London in the right vein, when he brought forth Divinity with a scratched face, holding of her heart as if she were sick, because Martin would have forced her; but missing of his purpose, he left the print of his nails upon her cheeks, and poisoned her with a vomit, which he ministered unto her to make her cast up her dignities." Lyly, taking the same side, writes,—"Would those *comedies* might be allowed to be played that are penned, and then I am sure he [Martin Marprelate] would be *deciphered*, and so perhaps *discouraged*." Here are the very words which Harvey has repeated,—"He must needs be *discouraged* whom they *decipher*." Harvey, in a subsequent passage of the same tract, refers to this prostitution of the stage to party purposes in very striking words:—"The stately tragedy scorneth the trifling comedy, *and the trifling comedy flouteth the new ruffianism*." These circumstances appear to us very remarkable, with reference to the state of the drama about 1590. Shakspere's great contemporary, Edmund Spenser, in a poem entitled, "The Tears of the Muses," originally published in 1591, describes, in the "Complaint" of Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, the state of the drama at the time in which he is writing:—

"Where be the sweet delights of learning's treasure,
That wont with comic sock to beautify
The painted theatres, and fill with pleasure
The listeners' eyes, and ears with melody;
In which I late was wont to reign as queen,
And mask in mirth with graces well beseen?

O! all is gone; and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits,
Is laid a-bed, and nowhere now to see;
And in her room unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow brows and grissly countenance,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliance.

And him beside sits ugly Barbarism,
And brutish Ignorance, yerept of late
Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm,
Where being bred, he light and heaven does hate;
They in the minds of men now tyrannize,
And the fair scene with rudeness foul disguise.

All places they with folly have possess'd,
And with vain toys the vulgar entertain;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilom wont to wait upon my train,
Fine Counterfesance, and unhurtful Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort."

* Pierce's "Supererogation." Reprinted in "Archaica," p. 137.

Spenser was in England in 1590-1, and it is probable that "The Tears of the Muses" was written in 1590, and that the poet described the prevailing state of the drama in London during the time of his visit.

The four stanzas which we have quoted are descriptive, as we think, of a period of the drama when it had emerged from the semi-barbarism by which it was characterized, "from the commencement of Shakspere's boyhood, till about the earliest date at which his removal to London can be possibly fixed."* This description has nothing in common with those accounts of the drama which have reference to this "semi-barbarism." Nor does the writer of it belong to the school which considered a violation of the unities of time and place as the great defect of the English theatre. Nor does he assert his preference of the classic school over the romantic, by objecting, as Sir Philip Sydney objects, that "plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns." There had been, according to Spenser, a state of the drama that would

"Fill with pleasure
The listeners' eyes, and ears with melody."

Can any comedy be named, if we assume that Shakspere had, in 1590, not written any, which could be celebrated—and by the exquisite versifier of "The Faery Queen"—for its "melody?" Could any also be praised for

"That goodly glee
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits?"

Could the plays before Shakspere be described by the most competent of judges—the most poetical mind of that age next to Shakspere—as abounding in

"Fine Counterfesance, and unhurtful Sport,
Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort?"

We have not seen such a comedy, except some three or four of Shakspere's, which could have existed before 1590. We do not believe there is such a comedy from any other pen. What, according to the "Complaint" of Thalia, has banished such comedy? "Unscemly Sorrow," it appears, has been fashionable; not the proprieties of tragedy, but a sorrow

"With *hollow brows* and *grissly* countenance;"—

the violent scenes of blood which were offered for the excitement of the multitude, before the tragedy of real art was devised. But this state of the drama is shortly passed over. There is something more defined. By the side of this false tragic sit "ugly Barbarism and brutish Ignorance." These are not the barbarism and ignorance of the *old* stage;—they are

"Ycrept *of late*
Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm."

They "*now* tyrannize;" they now "disguise" the fair scene "with *rudeness*." The Muse of Tragedy, Melpomene, had previously described the "rueful spectacles" of "the stage." It was a stage which had no "true tragedy." But it *had* possessed

"Delight, and Laughter, deck'd in seemly sort."

Now "the trifling comedy flouteth *the new ruffianism*." The words of Gabriel

* "Edinburgh Review," vol. lxxi., page 469.

Harvey and Edmund Spenser agree in this. The bravos that "have the stage at commandment can furnish out vices and devils at their pleasure," says Harvey. This describes the *Vetus Comœdia*—the old comedy—of which Nashe boasts. Can there be any doubt that Spenser had this state of things in view when he denounced the

> "Ugly *Barbarism*,
> And brutish *Ignorance*, yerept of late
> Out of dread darkness of the deep abysm."

He denounced it in common with his friend Harvey, who, however he partook of the controversial violence of his time, was a man of learning and eloquence; and to whom only three years before he had addressed a sonnet of which the highest mind in the country might have been proud.

But we must return to the "Thalia." The four stanzas which we have quoted are immediately followed by these four others:—

> "All these, and all that else the comic stage
> With season'd wit and goodly pleasure graced,
> By which man's life in his likest image
> Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
> And those sweet wits, which wont the like to frame,
> Are now despis'd, and made a laughing game.
>
> And he, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
> With kindly counter, under mimic shade,
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late:
> With whom all joy and jolly merriment
> Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.
>
> Instead thereof scoffing Scurrility,
> And scornful Folly, with Contempt, is crept,
> Rolling in rhymes of shameless ribaldry,
> Without regard or due decorum kept;
> Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
> And doth the Learned's task upon him take.
>
> But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
> Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
> Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
> Which dare their follies forth so rashly throw,
> Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to mockery to sell."

Here there is something even stronger than what has preceded it, in the direct allusion to the state of the stage in 1590. Comedy had ceased to be an exhibition of "seasoned wit" and "goodly pleasure;" it no longer showed "man's life in his likest image." Instead thereof there was "Scurrility"—"scornful Folly"—"shameless Ribaldry;"—and "each idle wit"

> "doth the Learned's task upon him take."

It was the task of "the Learned" to deal with the high subjects of religious controversy—the "matters of state and religion," with which the stage had meddled. Harvey had previously said, in the tract quoted by us, it is "a godly motion, when *interluders* leave penning their pleasurable plays to become zealous ecclesiastical writers." He calls Lyly more expressly, with reference to this meddling, the "fool-

master of the theatre." In this state of things the acknowledged head of the comic stage was silent for a time:—

> "He, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,
> With *kindly* counter, under mimic shade,
> Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late."

And the author of "The Faery Queen" adds,

> "But that same *gentle* spirit, from whose pen
> Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow,
> Scorning the boldness of such base-born men,
> Which dare their follies forth so madly throw,
> Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell
> Than so himself to *mockery* to sell."

The love of personal abuse had driven out real comedy; and there was *one* who, for a brief season, had left the madness to take its course. We cannot doubt that

> "He, the man whom Nature self had made
> To mock herself, and Truth to imitate,"

was *William Shakspere.* Mr. Collier, in his "History of Dramatic Poetry," says of Spenser's "Thalia,"—"Had it not been certain that it was written at so early a date, and that Shakespeare *could not then* have exhibited his talents and acquired reputation, we should say at once that it could be meant for no other poet. It reads like a prophetic anticipation, which could not have been fulfilled by Shakspere until several years after it was published." Mr. Collier, when he wrote this, had not discovered the document which proves that Shakspere was a sharer in the Blackfriars Theatre at least a year before this poem was published. At a later period, Mr. Collier lends his valuable opinion to the belief that Spenser's lines did allude to Shakspere. We are happy in such a convert.* Spenser, we have no doubt, described a real man, and real facts. He made no "prophetic anticipation;" there had been genuine comedy in existence; the ribaldry had driven it out for a season. The poem has reference to some *temporary* degradation of the stage; and what this temporary degradation was is most exactly defined by the public documents of the period, and the writings of Harvey, Nashe, and Lyly. The dates of all these proofs correspond with minute exactness. And who then is "*our pleasant Willy,*" according to the opinion of those who would deny to Shakspere the title to the praise of the other great poet of the Elizabethan age? It is *John Lyly,* says Malone—the man whom Spenser's bosom friend was, at the same moment, denouncing as "the foolmaster of the theatre." We say, advisedly, that there is *absolutely no proof* that Shakspere had *not* written "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Comedy of Errors," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Taming of the Shrew," and "All's Well that Ends Well," amongst his comedies, before 1590: we believe that he alone merited the high praise of Spenser; that it was meant for him.

Eight years after the publication of "The Tears of the Muses," died in an obscure lodging-house in King Street, Westminster, "the prince of poets," Edmund Spenser. Ben Jonson, says, "He died for lack of bread in King Street, and refused twenty pieces sent him by my Lord Essex, and said he was sorry he had no time to spend them." The lack of bread could scarcely be. He could only have been a very short time in London, where he came to seek that imperfect compensation which the

* See Mr. Collier's "Life of Shakespeare," published in 1844. The arguments which we employed were printed in the first edition of this "Biography,"—1843.

government might afford him for some of his wrongs. His house was burnt; his wife and two children had fled from those outrages which had made

"The cooly shade
Of the green alders by the Mulla's shore,"

a place of terror and fatal recollections; his infant had perished in the flames which destroyed his property. But it seems impossible that one in his social position could die for lack of bread. He died most probably of that which kills as surely as hunger—the "*hysterica passio*" of Lear. In a few days most of the illustrious band of writers would be gathered round Spenser's grave in Westminster Abbey: "his hearse attended by poets, and mournful elegies, and poems, with the pens that wrote them, thrown into his tomb."* One of the ablest writers of our day, in his quaint and pleasant "Citation and Examination of William Shakspeare," &c., says, "William Shakspeare was the only poet who abstained from throwing in either pen or poem, at which no one marvelled, he being of low estate, and the others not having yet taken him by the hand." This is the language only of romance; for assuredly when Shakspere stood by the grave of Spenser, he of all the poets then living must have been held to be the head. He was the "pleasant Willie" of Spenser himself. Five years before, Spenser had also, without doubt, thus described him:—

"And there, though last not least, is *Aëtion;*
A gentler shepherd may nowhere be found:
Whose Muse, full of high thoughts' invention,
Doth like himself *heroically sound.*"†

Jonson says—

"He seems to *shake a lance*
As brandish'd at the eyes of ignorance."

Fuller compares him to the poet Martial, "in the *warlike sound of his surname,* whence some may conjecture him of a military extraction, hasti-vibrans, or Shakespeare." We cannot doubt of the allusion. He could not have meant to compare the poet with the Roman painter Aëtion. The fancy of Spenser might readily connect the "high thoughts" with the soaring eagle—*ἀετός*—and we might almost fancy that there was some association of the image with Shakspere's armorial bearings—"his crest or cognizance, a falcon, his wings displayed."

* Camden. † "Colin Clout 's come Home again," 1594.

[Richmond.]

CHAPTER V.

LEISURE.

JOHN STANHOPE, one of the gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, writes thus to Lord Talbot, in December, 1589:—"The Queen is so well as, I assure you, six or seven galliards in a morning, besides music and singing, is her ordinary exercise."* This letter is dated from Richmond. The magnificent palace which the grandfather of Elizabeth erected upon the ruins of the old palace of the Plantagenets was a favourite residence of the Queen. Here, where she danced her galliards, and made the courts harmonious with her music, she closed her life some ten years after,—not quite so deserted as was the great Edward upon the same spot, but the victim, in all probability, of blighted affections and unavailing regrets. Scarcely a vestige is now left of the second palace of Richmond. The splendid towers of Henry VII. have fallen; but the name which he gave to the site endures, and the natural beauty which fixed

* Lodge's "Illustrations," 4to., vol. ii., page 411.

here the old sovereigns of England, and which the people of all lands still come to gaze upon, is something which outlives the works of man, if not the memory of those works. In the Christmas of 1589 the Queen's players would be necessarily busy for the diversion of the Court. The records are lost which would show us at this period what were the precise performances offered to the Queen ; and the imperfect registers of the Council, which detail certain payments for plays, do not at this date refer to payments to Shakspere's company. But there can be little doubt that the Lord Chamberlain's servants were more frequently called upon for her Majesty's solace than the Lord Admiral's men, or Lord Strange's men, or the Earl of Warwick's men, to whom payments are recorded at this period. It is impossible that the registers of the Council, as published originally by Chalmers, should furnish a complete account of the theatrical performances at Court ; for there is no entry of any payment whatever for such performances, under the Council's warrant, between the 11th of March, 1593, and the 27th of November, 1597. The office-books of the Treasurers of the Chamber exhibit a greater blank at this time. We can have no doubt that the last decade of the sixteenth century was the most brilliant period of the regal patronage of the drama ; the period when Shakspere, especially,

"Made those flights upon the banks of Thames"

to which Jonson has so emphatically alluded. That Shakspere was familiar with Richmond we can well believe. He and his fellows would unquestionably, at the

[St. James's.]

holiday seasons of Christmas and Shrovetide, be at the daily command of the Lord Chamberlain, and in attendance upon the Court wherever the Queen chose to dwell.

The servants of the household, the ladies waiting upon the Queen, and even the great officers composing the Privy Council, seem to have been in a perpetual state of migration from palace to palace. Elizabeth carried this desire for change of place to an extent that was not the most agreeable to many of her subjects. Her progress from house to house, with a cloud of retainers, was almost ruinous to some who were yet unable to reject the honour. But even the frequent removals of the Court from palace to palace must have been productive of no little annoyance to the grave and the delicate amongst the royal attendants. The palaces were ill-furnished; and whenever the whim of a moment directed a removal, many of the heavier household necessaries had to be carried from palace to palace by barge or waggon. In the time of Henry VIII. we constantly find charges attendant upon these removals.* Gifford infers that in the time of which we are writing the practice was sufficiently common and remarkable to have afforded us one of our most significant and popular words: "To the smutty regiment, who attended the progresses, and rode in the carts with the pots and kettles, which, with every other article of furniture, were then moved from palace to palace, the people, in derision, gave the name of *black* guards,—a term since become sufficiently familiar, and never properly explained." † The palaces themselves were most inconveniently adapted for these changes. Wherever the Queen was, there was the seat of government. The Privy Council were in daily attendance upon the Queen; and every public document is dated from the Court. Official business of the most important nature had to be transacted in bedchambers and passages. Lady Mary Sydney, whose husband was Lord President of Wales, writes the most moving letter to an officer of the Lord Chamberlain, to implore him to beg his principal "to have some other room than my chamber for my lord to have his resort unto, as he was wont to have, or else my lord will be greatly troubled when he shall have any matters of dispatch; my lodging, you see, being very little, and myself continually sick, and not able to be much out of my bed." ‡ A great officer of state being obliged to transact business with his servants and suitors in his sick wife's bedroom, is a tolerable example of the inconvenient arrangements of our old palaces. Perhaps a more striking example of their want of comfort, and even of decent convenience, is to be found in a memorial from the maids of honour, which we have seen in the State Paper Office, humbly requesting that the partition which separates their sleeping-rooms at Windsor from the common passage may be somewhat raised, so as to shut them out from the possible gaze of her Majesty's gallant pages. If Windsor was thus inconvenient as a permanent residence, how must the inconvenience have been doubled when the Queen suddenly migrated there from St. James's, or Somerset Place, or Greenwich? The smaller palaces of Nonsuch and Richmond were probably still less endurable. But they were all the seats of gaiety, throwing a veil over fears and jealousies and feverish ambition. Our business is not with their real tragedies.

From about the period of Shakspere's first connection with the stage, and thence with the Court, Henry Lord Hunsdon, the kinsman of Elizabeth, was Lord Chamberlain. It is remarkable, that when Burbage erected the Blackfriars Theatre, in 1576, close by the houses of Lord Hunsdon and of the famous Ratcliffe, Earl of Sussex, Lord Hunsdon was amongst the petitioners against the project of Burbage. But the Earl of Sussex, who was then Lord Chamberlain, did not petition against the erection of a playhouse; and he may therefore be supposed to have approved of it. The opinions, however, of Lord Hunsdon must have undergone some considerable change; for upon his succeeding to the office of Lord Chamberlain upon the death of Sussex,

* See Nicolas's "Privy Purse Expenses of King Henry the Eighth."

† Note to "Every Man out of his Humour." ‡ The letter is given in Malone's "Inquiry," page 91.

[Somerset House.]

he became the patron of Shakspere's company. They were the Lord Chamberlain's men ; or, in other words, the especial servants of the Court. Henry Lord Hunsdon held this office for eleven years, till his death in 1596. Elizabeth bestowed upon him as a residence the magnificent palace of the Protector Somerset. Here, in the halls which had been raised out of the spoliation of the great Priory of St. John of Jerusalem, would the company of Shakspere be frequently engaged. The Queen occasionally made the palace her residence ; and it can scarcely be doubted that on these occasions there was revelry upon which the genius of the new dramatic poet, so immeasurably above all his compeers, would bestow a grace which a few years earlier seemed little akin to the spirit of the drama. That palace also is swept away ; and the place which once witnessed the stately measure and the brisk galliard—where Cupids shook their painted wings in the solemn masque—and where, above all, our great dramatic poet may first have produced his "Comedy of Errors," his "Two Gentlemen of Verona," his "Romeo and Juliet," and have been rewarded with smiles and tears, such as seldom were bestowed in the chill regions of state and etiquette,—that place now sees the complicated labours of the routine departments of a mighty government constantly progressing in their prosaic uniformity. No contrast can be more striking than the Somerset House of Queen Elizabeth's Lord

Chamberlain, and the Somerset House of Queen Victoria's Commissioners of Stamps and Taxes.

"How chances it they travel?" says Hamlet, speaking of the players—"Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways." Hamlet's "tragedians of the city" travel because "the boys carry it away." But there were other causes that more than once forced Shakspere's company to disperse, and which affected also every other company. That terrible affliction, the plague, almost invariably broke up the residence of the players. They were in general scattered about the country seeking a precarious maintenance, whilst their terror-stricken families remained in the fated city. In the autumn of 1592 the plague raged in London. Michaelmas term was kept at Hertford; as in 1593 it was at St. Albans. During this long period all the theatres were closed, the Privy Council justly alleging "that infected people, after their long keeping in and before they be cleared of their disease and infection, being desirous of recreation, use to resort to such assemblies, where through heat and throng they infect many sound persons." In the letters of Alleyn the player, which are preserved in Dulwich College, there is one to his wife, of this exact period, being dated from Chelmsford, the 2nd of May, 1593, which exhibits a singular picture of the indignities to which the less privileged players appear to have been subjected:—"I have no news to send thee, but I thank God we are all well, and in health, which I pray God to continue with us in the country, and with you in London. But, mouse, I little thought to hear that which I now hear by you, for it is well known, they say, that you were by my Lord Mayor's officers made to ride in a cart, you and all your fellows, which I am sorry to hear; but you may thank your two supporters, your strong legs I mean, that would not carry you away, but let you fall into the hands of such termagants." * On the 1st of September, 1592, there was a company of players at Cambridge, and, as it appears, engaged in a contest with the University authorities. On that day the Vice-Chancellor issued a warrant to the constable forbidding the inhabitants to allow the players to occupy any houses, rooms, or yards, for the purpose of exhibiting their interludes, plays, and tragedies. The players, however, disregarded the warrant; for on the 8th of September the Vice-Chancellor complains to the Privy Council that "certain light persons, *pretending themselves to be her Majesty's players*, &c., did take boldness, not only here to proclaim their interludes (by setting up of writings about our college gates), but also actually at Chesterton to play the same, which is a village within the compass of the jurisdiction granted to us by her Majesty's charter, and situated hard by the plot where Stourbridge fair is kept." The Privy Council does not appear to have been in a hurry to redress the grievance; for ten days afterwards the Vice-Chancellor and various heads of colleges repeated the complaint, alleging that the offenders were supported by Lord North (who resided at Kirtling, near Cambridge), who said "in the hearing as well of the players, as of divers knights and gentlemen of the shire then present," that an order of the Privy Council of 1575, forbidding the performance of plays in the neighbourhood of universities, "was no perpetuity." It was not till the following year that the Privy Council put an end to this unseemly contest, by renewing the letters of 1575. The company of Shakspere was not, we apprehend, the "certain light persons, pretending themselves to be her Majesty's players." The complaint of the Vice-Chancellor recites that one Dutton was a principal amongst them; and Dutton's company is mentioned in the accounts of the Revels as early as 1572. But for this notice of Dutton we might have concluded that the Queen's players were the company to which Shakspere belonged; and that his acquaintance with Cambridge, its splendid buildings, and its noble institutions, was to be associated with the memory of a dispute that is little creditable to those who

* Collier's "Memoirs of Edward Alleyn," page 24.

resisted the just exercise of the authority of the University. The Queen and her courtiers appear to have looked upon this contest in something of the spirit of mischievous drollery. Three months after the dispute, Dr. John Still, then Vice-Chancellor, Master of Trinity College, and Bishop of Bath and Wells, writes thus to the Lords of the Council: "Upon Saturday last, being the second of December, we received letters from Mr. Vice-Chamberlain by a messenger sent purposely, wherein, by reason that her Majesty's own servants in this time of infection may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes, his Honour hath moved our University (as he writeth that he hath also done the other of Oxford) to prepare a comedy in English, to be acted before her Highness by some of our students in this time of Christmas. How ready we are to do anything that may tend to her Majesty's pleasure, we are very desirous by all means to testify; but how fit we shall be by this is moved, having no practice in this English vein,* and being (as we think) nothing beseeming our students, specially out of the University, we much doubt; and do find our principal actors (whom we have of purpose called before us) very unwilling to play in English."† If Dr. Still were the author of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," as commonly believed, the joke is somewhat heightened; but at any rate it is diverting enough, as a picture of manners, to find the University who have opposed the performances of professional players, being called upon to produce a play in the "English vein," a species of composition mostly held in contempt by the learned as fitted only for the ignorant multitude.

In relation to Shakspere, we learn from these transactions at Cambridge that at the Christmas of 1592 there were no revels at Court: "her Majesty's own servants in this time of infection may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes." Shakspere, we may believe, during the long period of the continuance of the plague in London, had no occupation at the Blackfriars Theatre; and the pastimes of the Lord Chamberlain's servants were dispensed with at the palaces. It is probable that he was residing at his own Stratford. But with reference to his poetical labours it is scarcely necessary to infer that all his time was spent in "lonely musing." A notion has been propounded that he personally visited Italy. In the Local Illustrations to the "Taming of the Shrew," and the "Merchant of Venice," with which we were favoured by Miss Martineau, will be found some very striking proofs of Shakspere's intimate acquaintance, not only with Italian manners, but with those minor particulars of the domestic life of Italy, such as the furniture and ornaments of houses, which could scarcely be derived from books, nor, with reference to their minute accuracy, from the conversation of those who had "swam in a gondola." These observations were communicated to us by our excellent friend, without any previous theorizing on the subject, or any acquaintance with the opinions that had been just then advanced on this matter by Mr. Brown. It is not our intention here to go over this ground again; but it appears to us strongly confirmatory of the belief that Shakspere did visit Italy; that in 1593 he might have been absent several months from England without any interference with his professional pursuits. It is difficult to name any earlier period of his life in which we can imagine him with the leisure and the command of means necessary for such a journey. The subsequent part of the sixteenth century left him no leisure. "The Merchant of Venice" and "Othello" (in which there is also one or two remarkable indications of local knowledge) were produced within a few years of 1593. "The Taming of the Shrew" probably belongs to the same time. At any rate, looking at the poetical labours of Shakspere at this exact period, we may infer that there

* The English vein had gone out of use. In 1564, "Ezekias," a comedy in English by Dr. Nicholas Udall, was performed before Elizabeth in King's College Chapel.

† The various documents may be consulted in Collier's "Annals of the Stage," vol. i.

was some pause in his professional occupation; and that his leisure, from the autumn of 1592 to the summer of 1593, enabled him more systematically to cultivate those higher faculties which placed him, even in the opinion of his contemporaries, at the head of the living poets of England.

Let us place then the Shakspere of eight-and-twenty once more in the solitude of Stratford, with the experience of seven years in the pursuits which he has chosen as his profession. He has produced, we believe, several plays belonging to each class of the drama with which the early audiences were familiar. In the tragedy of "Andronicus," as it has come down to us, and with great probability in the first conceptions of "Hamlet" and of "Romeo and Juliet," the physical horrors of the scene were as much relied upon as attractions, if not more so, than the poetry and characterization. The struggles for the empery of France, and the wars of the Roses, had been presented to the people with marvellous animation; but the great dramatic principle of unity of idea had been but imperfectly developed, and probably, without the practice of that apprentice-period of the poet's dramatic life, would scarcely have been conceived in its ultimate perfection. Comedy, too, had been tried; and here the rude wit and the cumbrous affectations of his contemporaries had been supplanted by drollery and nature, with a sprinkle of graceful poetry whose essential characteristic is the rejection of the unnatural ornament and the conventional images which belong to every other dramatic writer of the period. The "Two Gentlemen of Verona," the "Comedy of Errors," "Love's Labour's Lost," the "Taming of the Shrew," and "All's Well that Ends Well," are essentially nobler and purer in their poetical elements than anything that Peele, or Greene, or Lyly, or Lodge, have bequeathed to us. That they are superior in many respects to many of the best productions of Shakspere's later contemporaries may be the result of the after-polish which we have no doubt the poet bestowed even upon his least important works. They, with the histories and tragedies we have named, essentially belonged, we think, to his earliest period. We are about to enter upon the career of a higher ambition.

William Shakspere left Stratford about 1585 or 1586, an adventurer probably, but, as we hold, not the reckless adventurer which it has been the fashion to represent him. We know not whether his wife and children were with him in London. There is no evidence to show that they did not so dwell. If he were absent alone during a portion of the year from his native place, his visits to his family would not necessarily be of rare occurrence and of short duration. The Blackfriars was a winter theatre, although at a subsequent period, when the Globe was erected, it was let for summer performances to the "children of the Chapel." With rare exceptions the performances at Court occupied only the period from Hallowmas Day to Shrove Tuesday. The latter part of the summer and autumn seem therefore to have been at Shakspere's disposal, at least during the first seven or eight years of his career. That he spent a considerable portion of the year in the quiet of his native walks we may be tolerably well assured, from the constant presence of rural images in all his works, his latest as well as his earliest. We have subsequently more distinct evidence in his farming occupations. At the time of which we are now writing we believe that a great public calamity gave him unwonted leisure; and that here commences what may be called the middle period of his dramatic life, which saw the production of his greater histories, and of some of his most delightful comedies.

There is a well-known passage in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" which goes very far towards a determination of its date. Titania thus reproaches Oberon:—

> "These are the forgeries of jealousy:
> And never, since the middle summer's spring,
> Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,

By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
Or on the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
Therefore, the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud,
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat; and the green corn
Hath rotted, ere his youth attain'd a beard:
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain flock;
The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud;
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable."

The summers of 1592, 1593, and 1594 were so unpropitious, that the minute description of Titania, full of the most precise images derived from the observation of a resident in the country, gives us a far more exact idea of these remarkable seasons than any of the prosaic records of the time. In 1594, Dr. J. King thus preaches at York: "Remember that the spring (that year when the plague broke out) was very unkind, by means of the abundance of rains that fell. Our July hath been like to a February, our June even as an April, so that the air must needs be infected." He then adds, speaking of three successive years of scarcity, "Our years are turned upside down. Our summers are no summers; our harvests are no harvests; our seed-times are no seed-times." There are passages in Stow's "Annals," and in a manuscript by Dr. Simon Forman in the Ashmolean Museum, which show that in the June and July of 1594 there were excessive rains. But Stow adds, of 1594, "notwithstanding in the month of August there followed a fair harvest." This does not agree with

"The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted, ere his youth attain'd a beard."

It is not necessary to fix Shakspere's description of the ungenial season upon 1594 in particular. There was a succession of unpropitious years, when

"The spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries."

"Our summers are no summers; our harvests are no harvests; our seed-times are no seed-times." Churchyard, in his preface to a poem entitled "Charity,"* says, "A great nobleman told me this last wet summer the weather was too cold for poets." The poetry of Shakspere was as much subjective as objective, to use one of the favourite distinctions which we have derived from the Germans. The most exact description of the coldness of the "wet-summer" becomes in his hands the finest poetry, even taken apart from its dramatic propriety; but in association with the quarrels of Oberon and Titania, it becomes something much higher than descriptive poetry. It is an integral part of those wondrous efforts of the imagination which we can call by no other name than that of creation. It is in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," as it appears to us, that Shakspere first felt the entire strength of his creative power. That noble poem is something so essentially different from any

* Quoted by Mr. Halliwell in his "Introduction to 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'"

thing which the stage had previously possessed, that we must regard it as a great effort of the highest originality; conceived perhaps with very little reference to its capacity of pleasing a mixed audience; probably composed with the express intention of being presented to "an audience fit though few," who were familiar with the allusions of classical story, of "masque and antique pageantry," but who had never yet been enabled to form an adequate notion of

> "Such sights as youthful poets dream
> On summer eves by haunted stream."

The exquisite delicacy of the compliment to "the imperial votaress" fully warrants the belief that in the season of calamity, when her own servants "may not disport her Highness with their wonted and ordinary pastimes," one of them was employed in a labour for her service, which would make all other pastimes of that epoch appear flat and trivial.

It is easy to believe that if any external impulse were wanting to stimulate the poetical ambition of Shakspere—to make him aspire to some higher character than that of the most popular of dramatists—such might be found in 1593 in the clear field which was left for the exercise of his peculiar powers. Robert Greene had died on the 3rd of September, 1592, leaving behind him a sneer at the actor who aspired "to bombast out a blank verse." Even had his genius not been destroyed by the wear and tear, and the corrupting influences, of a profligate life, he never could have competed with the mature Shakspere. But as we know that "the only Shake-scene in a country," at whom the unhappy man presumed to scoff, felt the insult somewhat deeply, so we may presume he took the most effectual means to prove to the world that he was not, according to the malignant insinuation of his envious compeer, "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers." We believe that in the gentleness of his nature, when he introduced into "A Midsummer Night's Dream,"

> "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
> Of learning, late deceas'd in beggary,"

he dropped a tear upon the grave of him whose demerits were to be forgiven in his misery. On the 1st of June, 1593, Christopher Marlowe perished in a wretched brawl, "slain by Francis Archer," as the Register of Burials of the parish of St. Nicholas, Deptford, informs us. Who was left of the dramatists that could enter into competition with William Shakspere, such as he then was? He was almost alone. The great disciples of his school had not arisen. Jonson had not appeared to found a school of a different character. It was for him, thenceforth, to sway the popular mind after his own fashion; to disregard the obligation which the rivalry of high talent might have imposed upon him of listening to other suggestions than those of his own lofty art; to make the multitude bow before that art, rather than that it should accommodate itself to their habits and prejudices. But at a period when the exercise of the poetical power in connection with the stage was scarcely held amongst the learned and the polite in itself to be poetry, Shakspere vindicated his reputation by the publication of the "Venus and Adonis." It was, he says, "the first heir of my invention." There may be a doubt whether Shakspere meant to say literally that this was the first poetical work that he had produced; or whether he held, in deference to some critical opinions, that his dramatic productions could not be classed amongst the heirs of "invention." We think that he meant to use the words literally; and that he used them at a period when he might assume, without vanity, that he had taken his rank amongst the poets of his time. He dedicates to the Earl of Southampton something that had not before been given

to the world. He calls his verses "unpolished lines;" he vows to take advantage of all idle hours till he had honoured the young patron of the Muses with "some graver labour." But *invention* was received then, as it was afterwards, as the highest quality of the poet. Dryden says.—"A poet is a maker, as the word signifies; and he who cannot make, that is *invent*, hath his name for nothing." We consider, therefore, that "my invention" is not the language of one unknown to fame. He was exhibiting the powers which he possessed upon a different instrument than that to which the world was accustomed; but the world knew that the power existed. We employ the word *genius* always with reference to the inventive or creative faculty. Substitute the word genius for invention, and the expression used by Shakspere sounds like arrogance. But the substitution may indicate that the actual expression could not have been used by one who came forward for the first time to claim the honours of the poet. It has been argued from this expression that Shakspere had produced nothing original before the "Venus and Adonis"—that up to the period of its publication, in 1593, he was only a repairer of the works of other men. We hold that the expression implies the direct contrary.

The dreary summer of 1593 has passed away;

> "And on old Hyems' chin, and ivy crown,
> An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
> Is, as in mockery, set."

From the 1st of August in that year to the following Christmas the Queen was at Windsor. The plague still raged in London, and the historian gravely records, amongst the evils of the time, that Bartholomew Fair was not held. Essex was at Windsor during this time, and probably the young Southampton was there also. It was a long period for the Court to remain in one place. Elizabeth was afraid of the plague in the metropolis; and upon a page dying within the castle on the 21st of November she was about to rush away from the pure air which blew around the "proud keep." But "the lords and ladies who were accommodated so well to their likings had persuaded the Queen to suspend her removal from thence till she should see some other effect." * Living in the dread of "infection," we may believe that the Queen would require amusement; and that the Lord Chamberlain's players, who had so long forborne to resort to the metropolis, might be gathered around her without any danger from their presence. If so, was the "Midsummer Night's Dream" one of the novelties which her players had to produce? But there was another novelty which tradition tells us was written at the especial desire of the Queen herself—a comedy which John Dennis altered in 1702, and then published with the following statement:—"That this comedy was not despicable, I guessed for several reasons: first, I knew very well that it had pleased one of the greatest queens that ever was in the world—great not only for her wisdom in the arts of government, but for her knowledge of polite learning, and her nice taste of the drama; for such a taste we may be sure she had, by the relish which she had of the ancients. This comedy was written at her command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it acted, that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation." The plain statement of Dennis, "this comedy was written at her command," was amplified by Rowe into the circumstancial relation that Elizabeth was so well pleased with the character of Falstaff in "Henry IV." "that she commanded him [Shakspere] to continue it for one play more, and to show him in love." Hence all the attempts, which have only resulted in confusion worse confounded, to connect "The Merry

* Letter from Mr. Standen to Mr. Bacon, in Birch's "Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth."

Wives of Windsor" with "Henry IV." We have stated this question fully, and, we hope, impartially, in the Notice of "The Merry Wives of Windsor."* The belief is there expressed, that the comedy was written in 1593, or very near to that time; the circumstance itself being somewhat of a proof that Shakspere was at Windsor precisely at that period, and ready to obey the Queen's command that a comedy suggested by herself should be "finished in fourteen days."

In 1593 Elizabeth remained five months in her castle, repressing her usual desire to progress from county to county, or to move from palace to palace. She has completed her noble terrace, with its almost unrivalled prospect of beauty and fertility. Her gallery too is finished, whose large bay window looks out upon the same magnificent landscape. The comedy, which probably arose out of some local incident, abundantly provocative of courtly gossip and merriment, has hastily been produced. The hand of the master is yet visible in it. Its allusions, contrary to the wont of the author, are all local, and therefore agreeable to his audience. As his characters

* "Studies," Book V., c. VI.

hover about Frogmore, with its farm-house where Anne Page is a feasting; as Falstaff meets his most perilous adventure in Datchet Mead; as Mistress Anne and her Fairies crouch in the castle ditch,—the poet shows that he has made himself familiar with the scenes where the Queen delighted to dwell. The characters, too, are of the very time of the representation of the play, perhaps more than one of them copied from actual persons. In the original sketch Shakspere hardly makes an attempt to transfer the scene to an earlier period. The persons of the drama are all of them drawn from the rich storehouse of the humours of the middle classes of his own day. We may readily believe the tradition which tells us that the Queen was "very well pleased with the representation." The compliment to her in association with Windsor, in the last scene, where the drollery is surrounded with the most appropriate poetry, sufficiently indicates the place at which the comedy was performed, and the audience to whom it was presented:

> "About, about;
> Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out:
> Strew good luck, ouphes, on every sacred room,
> That it may stand till the perpetual doom,
> In state as wholesome as in state 't is fit;
> Worthy the owner, and the owner it."

This is one of the few passages which in the amended edition remain unaltered from the original text.

[Windsor.]

[The Globe Theatre.]

CHAPTER VI.

THE GLOBE.

We have a distinct record when the theatres were re-opened after the plague. The "Diary" of Philip Henslowe records that "the Earl of Sussex his men" acted "Huon of Bordeaux" on the 28th of December, 1593. Henslowe appears to have had an interest in this company. It is probable that Shakspere's theatre of the Blackfriars was opened about the same period. We have some evidence to show what was the duration of the winter season at this theatre; for the same diary shows that from June, 1594, the performances of the theatre at Newington Butts were a joint under-

taking by the Lord Admiral's men and the Lord Chamberlain's men. How long this association of two companies lasted is not easy to determine ; but during the month of June we have entries of the exhibition of "Andronicus," of "Hamlet," and of "The Taming of a Shrew." No subsequent entries exhibit the names of plays which have any real or apparent connection with Shakspere.* It appears that in December, 1593, Richard Burbage entered into a bond with Peter Streete, a carpenter, for the performance on the part of Burbage of the covenants contained in an indenture of agreement by which Streete undertook to erect a new theatre for Burbage's company. This was the famous Globe on the Bankside, of which Shakspere was unquestionably a proprietor. We thus see that in 1594 there were new demands to be made upon his invention ; and we may reasonably conclude that the reliance of Burbage and his other fellows upon their poet's unequalled powers was one of their principal inducements to engage in this new enterprise.

In the midst of his professional engagements, which doubtless were renewed with increased activity after their long suspension, Shakspere published his "Rape of Lucrece." He had vowed to take advantage of all idle hours till he had honoured Lord Southampton with some graver labour than the first heir of his invention. The "Venus and Adonis" was entered in the Registers of the Stationers' Company on the 18th of April, 1593. The "Lucrece" appears in the same registers on the 9th of May, 1594. That this elaborate poem was wholly or in part composed in that interval of leisure which resulted from the shutting of the theatres in 1593 may be reasonably conjectured ; but it is evident that during the year which had elapsed between the publication of the first and the second poem, Shakspere had been brought into more intimate companionship with his noble patron. The language of the first dedication is that of distant respect, the second is that of grateful friendship :—

"*To the Right Honourable Henry Wriothesly Earl of Southampton and Baron of Titchfield.*

"The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end ; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours ; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater ; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, to whom I wish long life, still lengthened with all happiness. Your Lordship's in all duty,

"WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE."

Henry Wriothesly was born October 6th, 1573. His grandfather, the first Earl, was the celebrated Chancellor of Henry VIII., a fortunate statesman and lawyer, whose memory, however he was lauded by his contemporaries, is infamously associated with the barbarous cruelties of that age in the torture of the heroic Ann Askew. His son Henry, the second Earl, bred up by his father in the doctrines opposed to the Reformation, adhered with pertinacity to the old forms of religion, and was of course shut out from the honours and employments of the government. He was unmolested, however, till his partisanship in the cause of Mary Queen of Scots occasioned his imprisonment in the Tower, in 1572. The house in which his father the Chancellor dwelt was also his London residence ; and its site is still indicated by the name of Southampton Buildings. In Aggas's map the mansion appears to have been backed by extensive gardens. Gervase Markham, in his curious book, printed in 1624, entitled "Honour in his Perfection ; or, a Treatise in Commendation of the Vertues and Renowned Vertuous Vndertakings of the Illustrious and Heroicall Princes Henry Earle of Oxenford, Henry Earle of Southampton, Robert Earle of Essex, &c.," thus describes the state with which the father of Shakspere's friend was surrounded —"His muster-roll never consisted of four lackeys and a coachman, but of a whole troop of at least a hundred well-mounted gentlemen and yeomen ; he was

* See "Studies," p. 62.

not known in the streets by guarded liveries, but by gold chains; not by painted butterflies, ever running as if some monster pursued them, but by tall goodly fellows, that kept a constant pace, both to guard his person and to admit any man to their lord which had serious business." The pomp with which he was encircled might in some degree have compensated for the absence of courtly splendour. But he lived not long to enjoy his solitary dignity, or, as was sufficiently probable, to conform to the opinions which might have opened to him the road to the honours of the crown. He died in 1581, leaving two children, Henry and Mary. The boy earl was only eight years old at the death of his father. During his long minority the accumulation of the family property must have been great; and we may thus believe that the general munificence of his patronage in after-life has not been over-rated. He appears to have had careful guardians, who taught him that there were higher honours to be won than those which his rank and wealth gave him. At the age of twelve he became a student of St. John's College, Cambridge; and four years afterwards took the degree of Master of Arts by the usual exercises.* He subsequently became, according to one account, a member of Gray's Inn. At the period when Shakspere dedicated to him his "Venus and Adonis" he was scarcely twenty years of age. He is supposed to have become intimate with Shakspere from the circumstance that his mother had married Sir Thomas Heneage, who filled the office of Treasurer of the Chamber, and in the discharge of his official duties would be brought into frequent intercourse with the Lord Chamberlain's players. This is Drake's theory. The more natural belief appears to be that he had a strong attachment to literature, and, with the generous impetuosity of his character, did not regard the distinctions of rank to the extent with which they were regarded by men of colder temperaments and more worldly minds. Shakspere appears to have been the first amongst the writers of his day that offered a public tribute to the merits of the young nobleman. Both the dedications, and especially that of "Lucrece," are conceived in a modest and a manly spirit, entirely different from the ordinary language of literary adulation. Nashe, who dedicates a little book to him at the same period, after calling him "a dear lover and cherisher, as well of the lovers of poets as of poets themselves," gives us one of the many proofs that the characters of satirist and flatterer may have some affinity:—"Incomprehensible is the height of your spirit, both in heroic resolution and matters of conceit. Unreprievably perisheth that book whatsoever to waste paper which on the diamond rock of your judgment disasterly chanceth to be shipwracked." Gervase Markham, who many years after became the elaborate panegyrist of Southampton, dedicates a tragedy to him in the following sonnet, in 1595:—

"Thou glorious laurel of the Muses' hill,
Whose eyes doth crown the most victorious pen;
Bright lamp of virtue, in whose sacred skill
Lives all the bliss of ears-enchanting men:
From graver subjects of thy grave assays,
Bend thy courageous thoughts unto these lines;
The grave from whence mine humble Muse doth raise
True honour's spirit in her rough designs:
And when the stubborn stroke of my harsh song
Shall seasonless glide through almighty ears,
Vouchsafe to sweet it with thy blessed tongue,
Whose well-tun'd sound stills music in the spheres:
So shall my tragic lays be blest by thee,
And from thy lips suck their eternity."

This hyperbolical praise is something different from Shakspere's simple expressions of respect and devotion in the dedication to the "Lucrece." There is evidence in

* "Cum prius disputasset publicè pro gradu."—*Harleian MS.* 7138.

that dedication of a higher sort of intercourse between the two minds than consists with any forced adulation of any kind, and especially with any extravagant compliments to the learning and to the abilities of a superior in rank. Such testimonies are always suspicious; and probably honest old Florio, when he dedicated his "World of Words" to the Earl in 1598, shows pretty correctly what the race of panegyrists expected in return for their compliments: "In truth, I acknowledge an entire debt, not only of my best knowledge, but of all; yea of more than I know, or can, to your bounteous lordship, in whose pay and patronage I have lived some years; to whom I owe and vow the years I have to live. But, as to me, and many more, the glorious and gracious sunshine of your honour hath infused light and life." There is an extraordinary anecdote told by Rowe of Lord Southampton's munificence to Shakspere, which seems to bring the poet somewhat near to Florio's plain-speaking association of pay and patronage:—"What grace soever the Queen conferred upon him, it was not to her only he owed the fortune which the reputation of his wit made. He had the honour to meet with many great and uncommon marks of favour and friendship from the Earl of Southampton, famous in the histories of that time for his friendship to the unfortunate Earl of Essex. It was to that noble lord that he dedicated his poem of 'Venus and Adonis.' There is one instance so singular in the magnificence of this patron of Shakspeare's, that if I had not been assured that the story was handed down by Sir William D'Avenant, who was probably very well acquainted with his affairs, I should not have ventured to have inserted; that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds, to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse generosity the present age has shown to French dancers and Italian singers." * This is one of the many instances in which we are not warranted in rejecting a tradition, however we may look suspiciously upon the accuracy of its details. D'Avenant could scarcely be very well acquainted with Shakspere's affairs, for he was only ten years old when Shakspere died. The sum mentioned as the gift of the young nobleman to the poet is so large, looking at the value of money in those days, that it could scarcely consist with the independence of a generous spirit to bear the load of such a prodigality of bounty. The notions of those days were, however, different from ours. Examples will readily suggest themselves of the most lavish rewards bestowed by princes and nobles upon great painters. They received such gifts without any compromise of their intellectual dignity. It was the same then with poets. The public, now the best patron, was then but a sorry paymaster; and the great stepped in to give the price for a dedication as they would purchase any other gratification of individual vanity. According to the habits of the time Shakspere might have received a large gift from Lord Southampton, without any forfeiture of his self-respect. Nevertheless, Rowe's story must still appear sufficiently apocryphal: "My Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds, to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to." It is not necessary to account for the gradual acquisition of property by Shakspere that we should yield our assent to this tradition, without some qualification. In 1589, when Lord Southampton was a lad at College, Shakspere had already acquired that property which was to be the foundation of his future fortune. He was then a shareholder in the Blackfriars Theatre. That the adventure was a prosperous one, not only to himself but to his brother shareholders, may be inferred from the fact that four years afterwards they began the building of another theatre. The Globe was commenced in December, 1593; and being constructed for the most part of wood, was ready to be opened, we should imagine, in the summer of 1594. In 1596 the same prosperous company were prepared to

* Rowe's "Life of Shakspeare."

expend considerable sums upon the repair and extension of their original theatre, the Blackfriars. The name of Shakspere occupies a prominent position in the document from which we collect this fact: it is a petition to the Lords of the Privy Council from "Thomas Pope, Richard Burbadge, John Hemings, Augustine Philips, William Shakespeare, William Kempe, William Slye, Nicholas Tooley, and others, servants to the Right Honorable the Lord Chamberlain to her Majesty;" and it sets forth that they are "the owners and players of the private theatre in the Blackfriars; that it hath fallen into decay; and that it has been found necessary to make the same more convenient for the entertainment of auditories coming thereto." It then states what is important to the present question:—"To this end your petitioners have all and each of them put down sums of money according to their shares in the said theatre, and which they have justly and honestly gained by the exercise of their quality of stage-players." It then alleges that certain inhabitants of the precinct had besought the Council not to allow the said private house to remain open, "but hereafter to be shut up and closed, to the manifest and great injury of your petitioners, who have no other means whereby to maintain their wives and families, but by the exercise of their quality as they have heretofore done." The common proprietorship of the company in the Globe and Blackfriars is also noticed:—"In the summer season your petitioners are able to play at their new-built house on the Bankside, called the Globe, but in the winter they are compelled to come to the Blackfriars." If the winter theatre be shut up, they say they will be "unable to practise themselves in any plays or interludes when called upon to perform for the recreation and solace of her Majesty and her honourable Court, as they have been heretofore accustomed." Though the Registers of the Council and the Office-books of the Treasurer of the Chamber are wanting for this exact period, we have here the distinct evidence of the intimate relation between Shakspere's company and the Court. The petitioners, in concluding by the prayer that their "honourable Lordships will grant permission to finish the reparations and alterations they have begun," add as a reason for this favour that they "have hitherto been well ordered in their behaviour, and just in their dealings." * The performances at the Blackfriars went on without interruption. Shakspere, in 1597, bought "all that capital messuage or tenement in Stratford called the New Place." This appears to have been his first investment in property distinct from his theatrical speculations. The purchase of the best house in his native town, at a period of his life when his professional occupations could have allowed him little leisure to reside in it, would appear to have had in view an early retirement from a pursuit which probably was little agreeable to him. His powers as a dramatic writer might be profitably exercised without being associated with the actor's vocation. We know from other circumstances that at this period Stratford was nearest to his heart. On the 24th of January, 1598, Mr. Abraham Sturley, an Alderman of Stratford, writes to his brother-in-law, Richard Quiney, then in London:—"I would write nothing unto you now—but come home. I pray God send you comfortably home. This is one special remembrance, from our father's motion. It seemeth by him that our countryman Mr. Shakspere is willing to disburse some money upon some odd yard land or other at Shottery, or near about us. He thinketh it a very fit pattern to move him to deal in the matter of our tithes. By the instructions you can give him thereof, and by the friends he can make therefore, we think it a fair mark for him to shoot at, and not impossible to hit. It obtained, would advance him indeed, and would do us much good." We thus see that in a year after the purchase of New Place, Shakspere's accumulation of money was going on. The worthy alderman and his connections appear to look confidently to their countryman, Mr. Shakspere, to assist them in their needs. On

* The petition is printed in Mr. Collier's "Annals of the Stage," vol. i., p. 298.

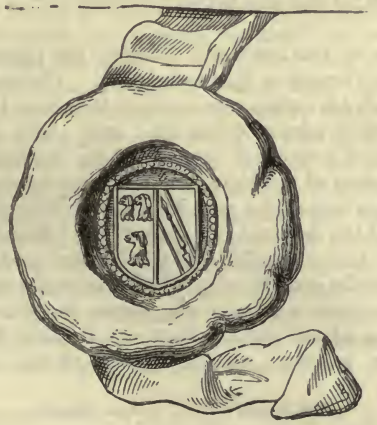
the 4th of November, in the same year, Sturley again writes a very long letter "to his most loving brother Mr. Richard Quiney, at the Bell, in Carter Lane, in London," in which he says of a letter written by Quiney to him on the 21st of October, that it imported, amongst other matters, "that our countryman Mr. W. Shakspere would procure us money, which I well like of, as I shall hear when, and where, and how; and I pray let not go that occasion, if it may sort to any indifferent conditions." Quiney himself at this very time writes the following characteristic letter to his "loving good friend and countryman, Mr. William Shakspere:"—"Loving countryman, I am bold of you as of a friend, craving your help with thirty pounds upon Mr. Bushell and my security, or Mr. Myttens with me. Mr. Rosswell is not come to London as yet, and I have especial cause. You shall friend me much in helping me out of all the debts I owe in London, I thank God, and much quiet to my mind which would not be indebted. I am now towards the Court in hope your answer for the dispatch of my business. You shall neither lose credit nor money by me, the Lord willing; and now but persuade yourself so as I hope, and you shall not need to fear but with all hearty thankfulness I will hold my time, and content your friend, and if we bargain farther, you shall be the paymaster yourself. My time bids me to hasten to an end, and so I commit this to your care and hope of your help. I fear I shall not be back this night from the Court. Haste. The Lord be with you and with us all. Amen. From the Bell in Carter Lane, the 25th October, 1598. Yours in all kindness, Ryc. Quiney." The anxious dependence which these honest men appear to have upon the good offices of their townsman is more satisfactory even than the evidence which their letters afford of his worldly condition.

In the midst of this prosperity the registers of the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon present to us an event which must have thrown a shade over the brightest prospects.

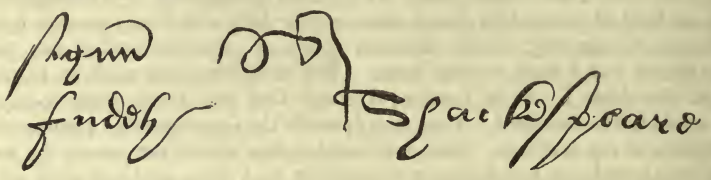
August 11 Hamnet filius William Shakspeare

This is the register of the burial of the only son of the poet in 1596. Hamnet was

Hamnet Hall



born on the 2nd of February, 1585; so that at his death he was eleven years and six months old. He was a twin child; and it is not unlikely that he was constitutionally weak. Some such cause interfered probably with the education of the twin-sister Judith; for whilst Susannah, the elder, is recorded to have been "witty above her sex," and wrote a firm and vigorous hand, as we may judge from her signature to a deed in 1639 (see p. 227), the mark of Judith appears as an attesting witness to a conveyance in 1611.



Shakspere himself has given us a most exquisite picture of a boy, who, like his own Hamnet, died young, in whom the imaginative faculty was all-predominant. Was this a picture of his own precocious child?

"*Her.* Take the boy to you: he so troubles me,
'T is past enduring.
1 *Lady.* Come, my gracious lord,
Shall I be your playfellow?
Mam. No, I 'll none of you.
1 *Lady.* Why, my sweet lord?
Mam. You 'll kiss me hard; and speak to me as if
I were a baby still.—I love you better.
2 *Lady.* And why so, my lord?
Mam. Not for because
Your brows are blacker; yet black brows they say,
Become some women best; so that there be not
Too much hair there, but in a semi-circle,
Or a half-moon made with a pen.
2 *Lady.* Who taught you this?
Mam. I learn'd it out of women's faces.—Pray, now,
What colour are your eyebrows?
1 *Lady.* Blue, my lord.
Mam. Nay, that 's a mock: I have seen a lady's nose
That has been blue, but not her eyebrows." *

With the exception of this inevitable calamity, the present period may probably be regarded as a happy epoch in Shakspere's life. He had conquered any adverse circumstances by which his earlier career might have been impeded. He had taken his rank among the first minds of his age; and, above all, his pursuits were so engrossing as to demand a constant exercise of his faculties, but to demand that exercise in the cultivation of the highest and the most pleasurable thoughts. This was the period to which belong the great histories of "Richard II.," "Richard III.," and "Henry IV.," and the delicious comedies of the "Merchant of Venice," "Much Ado about Nothing," and "Twelfth Night." These productions afford the most abundant evidence that the greatest of intellects was in the most healthful possession of its powers. These were not hasty adaptations for the popular appetite, as we may well believe some of the earlier plays were in their first shape; but highly-wrought performances, to which all the method of his cultivated art had been

* "Winter's Tale," Act II., Scene I.

strenuously applied. It was at this period that the dramatic poet appears not to have been satisfied with the applause of the Globe or the Blackfriars, or even with the gracious encouragements of a refined Court. During three years he gave to the world careful editions of some of these plays, as if to vindicate the drama from the pedantic notion that the Muses of tragedy and comedy did not meet their sisters upon equal ground. "Richard II." and "Richard III." were published in 1597; "Love's Labour's Lost," and "Henry IV.," Part I., in 1598; "Romeo and Juliet," corrected and augmented, in 1599; "Henry IV.," Part II., the "Merchant of Venice," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Much Ado about Nothing," in 1600. The system of publication then ceased. It no doubt interfered with the interests of his fellows; and Shakspere was not likely to assert an exclusive interest, or to gratify an exclusive pride, at the expense of his associates. But his reputation was higher than that of any other man, when only four of his plays were accessible to the *readers* of poetry. In 1598 it was proclaimed, not timidly or questionably, that "as Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for tragedy and comedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage:" and "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare."* It was certainly not at this period of Shakspere's life that he wrote with reference to himself, unlocking his heart to some nameless friend:—

"When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee,—and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

Sonnets of Shakspere were in existence in 1598, when Meres tells us of "his sugared sonnets among his private friends." We have entered so fully into the question, whether these poems are to be considered autobiographical, that it would be useless for us here to repeat an argument not hastily entered upon, or carelessly set forth. We believe that the order in which they were printed is an arbitrary one; that some form a continuous poem or poems, that others are isolated in their subjects and the persons to whom they are addressed; that some may express the poet's personal feelings, that others are wholly fictitious, dealing with imaginary loves and jealousies, and not attempting to separate the personal identity of the artist from the sentiments which he expressed, and the situations which he delineated. "We believe that, taken as works of art, having a certain degree of continuity, the Sonnets of Spenser, of Daniel, of Drayton, of Shakspere, although in many instances they might shadow forth real feelings and be outpourings of the inmost heart, were presented to the world as exercises of fancy, and were received by the world as such."† Even of those portions of these remarkable lyrics which appear to have an obvious reference to the poet's feelings and circumstances, we cannot avoid rejecting the principle of continuity; for they clearly belong to different periods of life, if they

* Francis Meres. † "Studies." p. 484.

are the reflection of his real sentiments. We have the playfulness of an early love, and the agonizing throes of an unlawful passion. They speak of a period when the writer had won no honour or substantial rewards—"in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," the period of his youth, if the allusion was at all real; and yet the writer is

"With time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn."

One little dedicatory poem says,

"Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
To thee I send this written embassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit."

Another (and it is distinctly associated with what we hold to be a continued little poem, wholly fictitious, in which the poet dramatizes as it were the poetical character) boasts that

"Not marble, not the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

Without attempting therefore to disprove that these Sonnets were addressed to the Earl of Southampton, or to the Earl of Pembroke, we must leave the reader who fancies he can find in them a shadowy outline of Shakspere's life to form his own conclusion from their careful perusal. We have endeavoured, in our analysis of these poems, to place before him all the facts which have relation to the subject. But to preserve in this place the unity of our narrative with reference to the period before us, we reprint a passage from the "Studies" to which we refer: "The 71st to the 74th Sonnets seem bursting from a heart oppressed with a sense of its own unworthiness, and surrendered to some overwhelming misery. There is a line in the 74th which points at suicide. We cling to the belief that the sentiments here expressed are essentially dramatic. In the 32nd Sonnet, where we recognise the man Shakspere speaking in his own modest and cheerful spirit, death is to come across his '*well-contented* day.' The opinion which we have endeavoured to sustain of the probable admixture of the artificial and the real in the Sonnets, arising from their supposed original fragmentary state, necessarily leads to the belief that some are accurate illustrations of the poet's situation and feelings. It is collected from these Sonnets, for example, that his profession as a player was disagreeable to him; and this complaint is found amongst those portions which we have separated from the series of verses which appear to us to be written in an artificial character. It might be addressed to any one of his family, or to some honoured friend, such as Lord Southampton:—

'O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.'

But if from his professional occupation his nature was felt by him to be subdued to what it worked in,—if thence his name received a brand,—if vulgar scandal sometimes assailed him,—he had high thoughts to console him, such as were never before imparted to mortal. This was probably written in some period of dejection, when his heart was ill at ease, and he looked upon the world with a slight tinge of indif-

ference, if not of dislike. Every man of high genius has felt something of this. It was reserved for the highest to throw it off, 'like dew-drops from the lion's mane.' But the profound self-abasement and despondency of the 74th Sonnet, exquisite as the diction is, appear to us unreal, as a representation of the mental state of William Shakspere; written, as it most probably was, at a period of his life when he revels and luxuriates (in the comedies which belong to the close of the sixteenth century) in the spirit of enjoyment, gushing from a heart full of love for his species, at peace with itself and with all the world."

[Lord Southampton.]

[Essex House.]

CHAPTER VII.

EVIL DAYS.

THE spring of 1599 saw Shakspere's friends and patrons, Essex and Southampton, in honour and triumph. "The 27th of March, 1599, about two o'clock in the afternoon, Robert Earl of Essex, Vicegerent of Ireland, &c., took horse in Seeding Lane, and from thence, being accompanied with divers noblemen and many others, himself very plainly attired, rode through Grace Street, Cornhill, Cheapside, and other high streets, in all which places, and in the fields, the people pressed exceedingly to behold him, especially in the highways for more than four miles space, crying, and saying, God bless your Lordship, God preserve your honour, &c., and some followed him until the evening, only to behold him. When he and his company came forth of London, the sky was very calm and clear, but before he could get past Iseldon [Islington] there arose a great black cloud in the north-east, and suddenly came lightning and thunder, with a great shower of hail and rain,

the which some held as an ominous prodigy." * It was perhaps with some reference to such forebodings that in the chorus to the fifth Act of "Henry V." —which of course must have been performed between the departure of Essex in March, and his return in September — Shakspere thus anticipates the triumph of Essex :—

"But now behold,
In the quick forge and working house of thought,
How London doth pour out her citizens!
The mayor and all his brethren, in best sort,—
Like to the senators of the antique Rome,
With the plebeians swarming at their heels,—
Go forth, and fetch their conquering Cæsar in:
As, by a lower but by loving likelihood,
Were now the general of our gracious empress
(As, in good time, he may) from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him!"

But the "ominous prodigy" was sadly realized. About the close of the year 1599, the Blackfriars Theatre was remarkable for the constant presence of two men of high rank, who were there seeking amusement and instruction as some solace for the bitter mortifications of disappointed ambition. "My Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland came not to the Court; the one doth but very seldom; they pass away the time in London merely in going to plays every day." † Essex had arrived from Ireland on the 28th of September, 1599—not

"Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,"—

not surrounded with swarms of citizens who

"Go forth, and fetch their conquering Cæsar in,"—

but a fugitive from his army; one who in his desire for peace had treated with rebels, and had brought down upon him the censures of the Court; one who knew that his sovereign was surrounded with his personal enemies, and who in his reckless anger once thought to turn his army homeward to compel justice at their hands; one who at last rushed alone into the Queen's presence, "full of dirt and mire," and found that he was in the toils of his foes. From that Michaelmas till the 26th of August, 1600, Essex was in the custody of the Lord Keeper; in free custody as it was termed, but to all intents a prisoner. It was at this period that Southampton and Rutland passed "away the time in London merely in going to plays every day." Southampton in 1598 had married Elizabeth Vernon, a cousin of Lord Essex. The marriage was without the consent of the Queen; and therefore Southampton was under the ban of the Court, having been peremptorily dismissed by Elizabeth from the office to which Essex had appointed him in the expedition to Ireland. Rutland was also connected with Essex by family ties, having married the daughter of Lady Essex, by her first husband, the accomplished Sir Philip Sydney. The season when these noblemen sought recreation at the Theatre was one therefore of calamity to themselves, and to the friend who was at the head of their party in the state. At Shakspere's theatre there were at this period abundant materials for the highest intellectual gratification. Of Shakspere's own works we know that at the opening of the seventeenth century there were twenty plays in existence. Thirteen (considering "Henry IV." as two parts) are recorded by Meres in 1598; "Much Ado About

* Stow's "Annals." † Letter of Rowland Whyte to Sir Robert Sydney, in the Sydney Papers.

Nothing," and "Henry V." (not in Meres' list), were printed in 1600; and we have to add the three parts of "Henry VI.," "The Taming of the Shrew," and the original "Hamlet," which are also wanting in Meres' record, but which were unquestionably produced before this period. We cannot with extreme precision fix the date of any novelty from the pen of Shakspere when Southampton and Rutland were amongst his daily auditors; but there is every reason to believe that "As You Like It" belongs as nearly as possible to this exact period. It is pleasant to speculate upon the tranquillizing effect that might have been produced upon the minds of the banished courtiers, by the exquisite philosophy of this most delicious play. It is pleasant to imagine Southampton visiting Essex in the splendid prison of the Lord Keeper's house, and there repeating to him from time to time those lessons of wisdom that were to be found in the woods of Arden. The two noblemen who had once revelled in all the powers and privileges of Court favouritism had now felt by how precarious a tenure is the happiness held of

> "That poor man that hangs on princes' favours."

The great dramatic poet of their time had raised up scenes of surpassing loveliness, where happiness might be sought for even amidst the severest penalties of fortune:—

> "Now, my co-mates, and brothers in exile,
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?"

It was for them to feel how deep a truth was there in this lesson:—

> "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

Happy are those that can feel such a truth;

> "That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
> Into so quiet and so sweet a style."

And yet the same poet had created a character that could interpret the feelings of those who had suffered undeserved indignities, and had learnt that the greatest crime in the world's eye was to be unfortunate. There was one in that play who could moralize the spectacle of

> "A poor sequester'd stag,
> That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,"

and who thus pierced through the hollowness of "this our life:"—

> "'Poor deer,' quoth he, 'thou mak'st a testament
> As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
> To that which had too much.' Then being there alone,
> Left and abandon'd of his velvet friend;
> 'Tis right,' quoth he; 'thus misery doth part
> The flux of company:' Anon, a careless herd,
> Full of the pasture, jumps along by him,
> And never stays to greet him; 'Ay,' quoth Jaques,
> 'Sweep on, you fat and greasy citizens;
> 'Tis just the fashion: Wherefore do you look
> Upon that poor and broken bankrupt there?'"

We could almost slide into the belief that "As You Like It" had an especial refer-

ence to the circumstances in which Essex and Southampton were placed in the spring of 1600. There is nothing desponding in its tone, nothing essentially misanthropical in its philosophy. Jaques stands alone in his railing against mankind. The healing influences of nature fall sweetly and fruitfully upon the exiled Duke and his co-mates. But, nevertheless, the ingratitude of the world is emphatically dwelt upon, even amidst the most soothing aspects of a pure and simple life "under the greenwood tree." The song of Amiens has perhaps a deeper meaning even than the railing of Jaques :—

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remember'd not."

There was one who had in him much of the poetical temperament—a gorgeous imagination for the externals of poetry—upon whose ear, if he ever sought common amusement in the days of his rising power, these words must have fallen like the warning voice that cried "woe." There was one who, when Essex in the days of his greatness had asked a high place for him and had been refused, received from the favourite a large private gift thus bestowed :—"I know that you are the least part of your own matter, but you fare ill because you have chosen me for your mean and dependence. You have spent your time and thoughts in my matters. I die, if I do not somewhat towards your fortune. You shall not deny to accept a piece of land, which I will bestow upon you." The answer of him who accepted a park from the hands of the generous man who had failed to procure him a place, was prophetic. The Duke of Guise, he said, was the greatest usurer in France, "because he had turned all his estates into obligations, having left himself nothing. . . . . I would not have you imitate this course, for you will find many bad debtors." It was this man who, in the darkest hour of Essex, when he was hunted to the death, said to the Lord Steward, "My lord, I have never yet seen in any case such favour shown to any prisoner."

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude."

Who can doubt that the ingratitude had begun long before the fatal catastrophe of the intrigues of Cecil and Raleigh? Francis Bacon, the ingrate, justifies himself by the "rules of duty" which opposed him to his benefactor, at the bar in his "public service." The same rules of duty were powerful enough to lead him to blacken his friend's character after his death, by garbling with his own hand the depositions against the victim of his faction, and publishing them as authentic records of the trial.* Essex, before the last struggles, had acquired experience of "bad debtors." The poet of "As You Like It" might have done something in teaching him to bear this and other afflictions bravely :—

"Thou seest, we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in."

Essex was released from custody in the August of 1600; but an illegal sentence had been passed upon him by commissioners, that he should not execute the offices

* See Jardine's "Criminal Trials, vol. i., page 387.

of a Privy Counsellor, or of Earl Marshal, or of Master of the Ordnance. The Queen signified to him that he was not to come to Court without leave. He was a marked and a degraded man. The wily Cecil, who at this very period was carrying on a correspondence with James of Scotland, that might have cost him his head, was laying every snare for the ruin of Essex. He desired to do what he ultimately effected, to goad his fiery spirit into madness. Essex was surrounded with warm but imprudent friends. They relied upon his unbounded popularity, not only as a shield against arbitrary power, but as a weapon to beat down the strong arm of authority. During the six months which elapsed between the release of Essex and the fatal outbreak of 1601, Essex House saw many changing scenes, which marked the fitful temper and the wavering counsels of its unhappy owner. Within a month after he had been discharged from custody, the Queen refused to renew a valuable patent to Essex, saying that "to manage an ungovernable beast he must be stinted in his provender." On the other hand, rash words that had been held to fall from the lips of Essex were reported to the Queen. He was made to say, "She was now grown an old woman, and was as crooked within as without."* The door of reconciliation was almost closed for ever. Essex House had been strictly private during its master's detention at the Lord Keeper's. Its gates were now opened, not only to his numerous friends and adherents, but to men of all persuasions, who had injuries to redress or complaints to prefer. Essex had always professed a noble spirit of toleration, far in advance of his age ; and he now received with a willing ear the complaints of all those who were persecuted by the government for religious opinions, whether Roman Catholics or Puritans. He was in communication with James of Scotland, urging him to some open assertion of his presumptive title to the crown of England. It was altogether a season of restless intrigue, of bitter mortifications and rash hopes. Between the closing of the Globe Theatre and the opening of the Blackfriars, Shakspere was in all likelihood tranquil amidst his family at Stratford. The winter comes, and then even the players are mixed up with the dangerous events of the time. Sir Gilly Merrick, one of the adherents of Essex, was accused amongst other acts of treason, with "having procured the *out-dated* tragedy of the 'Deposition of Richard II.' to be publicly acted at his own charge, for the entertainment of the conspirators."† In the "Declaration of the Treasons of the late Earl of Essex and his Complices," which Bacon acknowledges to have been written by him at the Queen's command, there is the following statement:—"The afternoon before the rebellion, Merrick, with a great company of others, that afterwards were all in the action, had procured to be played before them the play of deposing "King Richard the Second ;"—when it was told him by one of the players, that the play was *old*, and they should have loss in playing it, because few would come to it, there was forty shillings extraordinary given to play, and so thereupon played it was." In the "State Trials" this matter is somewhat differently mentioned : "The story of 'Henry IV.' being set forth in a play, and in that play there being set forth the killing of the King upon a stage ; the Friday before, Sir Gilly Merrick and some others of the Earl's train having an humour to see a play, they must needs have the play of 'Henry IV.' The players told them that was stale ; they could get nothing by playing that ; but no play else would serve : and Sir Gilly Merrick

* There is a slight resemblance in a passage in "The Tempest :"—

"And as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers."

† This is the translation of the passage in Camden's "Annales," &c., as printed in Kennett's "History of England." The accusation against Merrick is thus stated in the original:—"Quod exoletam tragœdiam de tragicâ abdicatione regis Ricardi Secundi in publico theatro coram conjuratis datâ pecuniâ agi curasset."

gives forty shillings to Philips the player to play this, besides whatsoever he could get." Augustine Philips was one of Shakspere's company; and yet it is perfectly evident that it was not Shakspere's "Richard II," nor Shakspere's "Henry IV.," that was acted on this occasion. In his "Henry IV." there is no "killing of the king upon a stage." His "Richard II.," which was published in 1597, was certainly not an out-dated play in 1601. A second edition of it had appeared in 1598, and it was no doubt highly popular as an acting play. But if any object was to be gained by the conspirators in the stage representation of the "deposing King Richard II.," Shakspere's play would not assist that object. The editions of 1597 and 1598 do not contain the deposition scene. That portion of this noble history which contains the scene of Richard's surrender of the crown was not printed till 1608; and the edition in which it appears bears in the title the following intimation of its novelty: "The Tragedie of 'King Richard the Second,' with *new additions of the Parliament Sceane, and the deposing of King Richard.* As it hath been *lately acted* by the Kinges servantes, at the Globe, by William Shake-speare." In Shakspere's Parliament scene our sympathies are wholly with King Richard. This, even if the scene were acted in 1601, would not have forwarded the views of Sir Gilly Merrick, if his purpose were really to hold up to the people an example of a monarch's dethronement. But, nevertheless, it may be doubted whether such a subject could be safely played at all by the Lord Chamberlain's players during this stormy period of the reign of Elizabeth. Her sensitiveness on this head was most remarkable. There is a very curious record existing of "that which passed from the Excellent Majestie of Queen Elizabeth, in her Privie Chamber at East Greenwich, 4° Augusti, 1601, 43° Reg. sui, towards William Lambarde,"* which recounts his presenting the Queen his "Pandecta" of historical documents to be placed in the Tower, which the Queen read over, making observations and receiving explanations. The following dialogue then takes place:—

"*W. L.* He likewise expounded these all according to their original diversities, which she took in gracious and full satisfaction; so her Majesty fell upon the reign of King Richard II., saying 'I am Richard II., know ye not that?'

"*W. L.* 'Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind gentleman, the most adorned creature that ever your Majesty made.'

"*Her Majesty.* 'He that will forget God will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses.'"

The "wicked imagination" that Elizabeth was Richard the Second is fixed upon Essex by the reply of Lambarde, and the rejoinder of the Queen makes it clear that the "wicked imagination" was attempted through the performance of the Tragedy of the Deposition of "Richard the Second:" "This tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses." The Queen is speaking six months after the outbreak of Essex; and it is not improbable that the outdated play—that performance which in the previous February the players "should have loss in playing"—had been rendered popular through the partisans of Essex after his fall, and had been got up in open streets and houses with a dangerous avidity. But there is a circumstance which renders it tolerably evident that, although Sir Gilly Merrick might have given forty shilling to Philips to perform that stale play, the company of Shakspere were not the performers. In the Office Book of the Treasurer of the Chamber† there is an entry on the 31st of March, 1601, of a payment to John Heminge and Richard Cowley, servants to the Lord Chamberlain, for three plays showed before her Highness on St. Stephen's Day at night [26th of December, 1600], Twelfth Day at night

* This was first printed from the original in Nicholl's "Progresses of Queen Elizabeth." Lambarde died in a fortnight after this interview.

† Cunningham's "Revels at Court."

[Essex.]

[January 6th, 1601], and Shrove Tuesday at night [Easter Day being on the 12th of April in 1601, Shrove Tuesday would be on the 3rd of March]. Shakspere's company were thus performing before the Queen within a week of the period when Essex was beheaded. They would not have been so performing had they exhibited the offensive tragedy.

In her conversation with Lambarde, Elizabeth uttered a great truth, which might not be unmingled with a retrospect of the fate of Essex. Speaking of the days of her ancestors, she said—"In those days force and arms did prevail, but now the wit of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man may be found." When Raleigh was called upon the trial of Essex, and "his oath given him," Essex exclaimed, "What booteth it to swear the fox?" The fox had even then accomplished his purpose. He had driven his victim onwards to that fatal movement of Sunday the 8th of February, which, begun without reasonable plan or fixed purpose, ended in casual bloodshed and death by the law. We may readily believe that the anxiety of Shakspere for his friends and benefactors would have led him to the scene of that wild commotion. He might have seen Essex and Southampton, with Danvers, Blount, Catesby, Owen Salisbury, and a crowd of followers, riding into Fleet Street, shouting, "For the Queen! for the Queen!" He might have heard the people crying on every side, "God save your honour! God bless your honour!" An hour or two later he might have listened to the proclamation in Gracechurch Street and Cheapside, that the Earl and all his company were traitors. By two o'clock of that fatal Sunday, Shakspere might have seen his friends fighting their way back through the crowds of armed men who suddenly assailed them, and, taking boat at Queenhithe, reach Essex House in safety. But it was surrounded with soldiers and artillery; shots were fired at the windows; the cries of women within mingled with the shouts of fury without. At last came the surrender, at ten o'clock at night. The axe with the edge turned towards the prisoners followed as a matter of course.

The period at which Essex fell upon the block, and Southampton was under condemnation, must have been a gloomy period in the life of Shakspere. The friendship of Southampton in all likelihood raised the humble actor to that just appreciation of himself which could alone prevent his nature being subdued to what it worked in. There had been a compromise between the inequality of rank and the inequality of intellect, and the fruit had been a continuance and a strengthening of that "love" which seven years earlier had been described as "without end." Those ties were now broken by calamity. The accomplished noble, a prisoner looking daily for death, could not know the depth of the love of his "especial friend."* He was beyond the reach of any service that this friend could render him. All was gloom and uncertainty. It has been said, and we believe without any intention to depreciate the character of the great poet, that "There seems to have been a period of Shakspere's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience; the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches;—these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear and Timon, but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind."† The genius of Shakspere was so essentially dramatic, that neither Lear, nor Timon, nor Jaques, nor the Duke in "Measure for Measure," nor Hamlet, whatever censure of mankind they may express, can altogether be held to reflect "a period of Shakspere's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world." That period is referred to the beginning of the seventeenth century, to which the plays belong that are said to exhibit these attributes.‡ But from this period there is certainly a more solemn cast of thought in all the works of the great poet. We wholly reject the opinion that this tone of mind in the slightest degree partakes of "the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches." There is a strong but yet tolerant censure of the heartlessness of worldly men, and the delusions of friendship, such as we have pointed out, in "As You Like It." There is the fierce misanthropy of Timon, so peculiar to his character and situation that it is quite lifted out of the range of a poet's self-consciousness: "the experience of man's worser nature" was not to make of Shakspere one "who all the human sons doth hate." "Measure for Measure" was, we believe, a covert satire upon the extremes of weak and severe government: it interprets nothing of unrequited affections and an evil conscience. The bitter denunciations of Lear are the natural reflections of his own disturbed thoughts, seeking to recover the balance of his feelings out of the vehemence of his passion. The "Hamlet," such as we have it in its altered state, as compared with the earlier sketch, does indeed contain passages which have a peculiar fitness for Hamlet's utterance, but which, at the same time, might afford relief in their expression to the poet's own wrestlings with the problem of existence. An example or two of these new passages will suffice :—

> "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seems to me all the uses of this world!
> Fye on't! O fye! 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank, and gross in nature,
> Possess it merely."

* The expression is used by Southampton in his letter to Lord Ellesmere introducing Shakspere and Burbage in 1608. See Collier's "New Facts," p. 33.

† Hallam's "Literature of Europe," vol. iii., p. 568.

‡ Mr. Hallam refers to "Hamlet" in its altered form.

Again :—

> "I have of late (but, wherefore, I know not) lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises: and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a steril promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you,—this brave o'erhanging firmament—this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

We can conceive this train of thought to be in harmony with the temper in which Shakspere must have regarded the public events of 1600. We may even believe that those events might have directed his mind to a more passionate and solemn and earnest exercise of its power than had previously been called forth. We may fancy such tragic scenes having their influence in rendering the great master of comedy, unrivalled amidst his contemporaries for the brilliancy of his wit and the genuineness of his humour, turn to other and loftier themes :—

> "I come no more to make you laugh; things now,
> That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
> Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
> Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow
> We now present." *

But the influence of time in the formation and direction of the poetical power must also be taken into account. Shakspere was now thirty-seven years of age. He had attained to the consciousness of his own intellectual strength, and he had acquired by long practice the mastery of his own genius. He had already learnt to direct the stage to higher and nobler purposes than those of mere amusement. It might be carried farther into the teaching of the highest philosophy through the medium of the grandest poetry. The epoch which produced "Othello," "Lear," and "Macbeth," has been described as exhibiting the genius of Shakspere in full possession and habitual exercise of power, "at its very point of culmination."†

The year 1601 was also a year which brought to Shakspere a great domestic affliction. His father died on the 8th of September of that year. It is impossible not to feel that Shakspere's family arrangements, imperfectly as we know them, had especial reference to the comfort and honour of his parents. When he bought New Place in 1597, his occupations then demanding his presence in London through great part of the year, his wife and children, we may readily imagine, were near neighbours if not under the same roof with his father and mother. They had sighed over the declining health of his little Hamnet,—they had watched over the growth of his Susanna and Judith. If restricted means had at any previous period assailed them, he had provided for the comforts of their advanced age. And now that father, the companion of his boyhood—he who had led him forth into the fields and had taught him to look at nature with a practical eye—was gone. More materials for deep thought in the year 1601. The Register of Stratford thus attests the death of this earliest friend :—

* Prologue to "Henry VIII." † Coleridge.

[Edinburgh in the Seventeenth Century.]

CHAPTER VIII.

DID SHAKSPERE VISIT SCOTLAND?

In an elaborate and ingenious paper read to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, by John Anderson, Esq., "On the Site of Macbeth's Castle at Inverness,"* the author says, "The extreme accuracy with which Shakspere has followed the minutiæ of Macbeth's career has given rise to the opinion that he himself visited those scenes which are immortalized by his pen." This question was first raised by William Guthrie, in 1767. Sir John Sinclair, as stated by Drake, "when speaking of the local traditions respecing Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane, infers from their coincidence with the drama, that Shakspeare, 'in his capacity of actor, travelled to Scotland in 1599, and collected on the spot materials for the exercise of his imagination.'" Drake doubts the validity of the inference. Malone gives the statement and the

* "Transactions," vol. iii., 28th January, 1828.

conjecture of Guthrie, adding, "If the writer had any ground for this assertion, why was it not stated? It is extremely improbable that Shakspeare should have left London at this period. In 1599 his 'King Henry V.' was produced, and without doubt acted with great applause." A subsequent visit of a company of English players to Scotland is detailed in a bulky local history published in London in 1818, —the "Annals of Aberdeen," by William Kennedy. This writer does not print the document upon which he founds his statement; but his narrative is so circumstantial as to leave little doubt that the company of players to which Shakspere belonged visited Aberdeen in 1601. The account of Mr. Kennedy has since been commented upon in a paper published in the "Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland," in 1830; and in a most lively, instructive, and learned volume —a model of guide-books—"The Book of Bon Accord, or a Guide to the City of Aberdeen," 1839.

The story of Macbeth was presented to Shakspere in a sufficiently complete form by the chronicler from whom he derived so many other materials, Holinshed. In testing, therefore, "the extreme accuracy with which Shakspere has followed the minutiæ of Macbeth's career"—by which we understand the writer to mean the accuracy of the poet in details of locality—we must inquire how far he agrees with, or differs from, and how far he expands, or curtails, the local statements or allusions of his chief authority. In the tragedy, Macbeth and Banquo, returning from their victory, are proceeding to Forres: "How far is 't called to Forres?" In the chronicler we find, "It fortuned as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed towards Forres, where the king then lay." So far there is agreement as to the scene. The historian thus proceeds: "They went sporting by the way together without other company, passing thorough the woods and fields, when suddenly, in the middest of a laund, there met them three women in strange and wild apparel." This description presents to us the idea of a pleasant and fertile place. The very spot where the supernatural soliciting occurs is a laund, or meadow amongst trees.* The poet chose his scene with greater art. The witches meet "*upon the heath;*" they stop the way of Macbeth and Banquo upon the "*blasted heath.*" But the poet was also more accurate than the historian in his traditionary topography. The country around Forres is wild moorland. Boswell, passing from Elgin to Forres in company with Johnson, says, "In the afternoon we drove over the very heath where Macbeth met the witches, according to tradition. Dr. Johnson again solemnly repeated, 'How far is 't called to Forres?' &c." But, opposed to this, the more general tradition holds that the "blasted heath" was on the east of Forres, between that town and Nairn. "A more dreary piece of moorland is not to be found in all Scotland. . . . . There is something startling to a stranger in seeing the solitary figure of the peat-digger or rush-gatherer moving amidst the waste in the sunshine of a calm autumn day; but the desolation of the scene in stormy weather, or when the twilight fogs are trailing over the pathless heath, or settling down upon the pools, must be indescribable."‡ We thus see that, whether Macbeth met the weird sisters to the east or west of Forres, there was in each place that desolation which was best fitted for such an event, and not the woods and fields and launds of the chronicler. From Forres, where Macbeth proffers his service and his loyalty to his king, was a day's ride to his own castle: "From hence to Inverness." Boece makes Inverness the scene of Duncan's murder. Holinshed merely says, "He slew the king at Enverns, or (as some say) at Botgosvane." The chroniclers would have furnished Shakspere no notion of the particular character of the castle at Inverness. Without some

* A laund is described by Camden as "a plain amongst trees."

† See "Illustrations of Macbeth," Act I.

local knowledge the poet might have placed it upon a frowning rock, lonely, inaccessible, surrounded with a gloom and grandeur fitted for deeds of murder and usurpation. He has chosen altogether a different scene:—

> "*Dun.* This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.
> *Ban.* This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd,
> The air is delicate."

Such a description, contrasting as it does with the deeds of terror that are to be acted in that pleasant seat, is unquestionably an effort of the highest art. But here again the art appears founded upon a reality. Mr. Anderson, in the paper which we have already quoted, has shown from various records that there was an old castle at Inverness. It was not the castle whose ruins Johnson visited, and of which Boswell says, "It perfectly corresponds with Shakspeare's description;" but a castle on an adjacent eminence called the Crown—so called from having been a royal seat. Traditionary lore, Mr. Anderson says, embodies this opinion, connecting the place with the history of Macbeth. "Immediately opposite to the Crown, on a similar eminence, and separated from it by a small valley, is a farm belonging to a gentleman of the name of Welsh. That part of the ascent to this farm next Viewfield, from the Great Highland Road, is called 'Banquo's Brae.' The whole of the vicinity is rich in wild imagery. From the mouth of the valley of Diriebught to King's Mills, thence by the road to Viewfield, and down the gorge of Aultmuniack to the mail-road along the sea-shore, we compass a district celebrated in the annals of *diablerie*." The writer the ngoes on to mention other circumstances corroborating his opinion as to the site of Macbeth's castle: "Traces of what has been an approach to a place of consequence are still discernible. This approach enters the lands of Diriebught from the present mail-road from Fort George; and, running through the valley, gradually ascends the bank of the Crown Hill; and, the level attained, strikes again towards the eastern point, where it terminates. Here the 'pleasant seat' is rumoured to have stood, facing the sea; and singularly correct with respect to the relative points of the compass will be found the poet's disposal of the portal 'at the south entry.'"

The investiture of Macbeth at Scone, and the burial of Duncan at Colmes-kill, are facts derived by the poet from the chronicler. Hence also Shakspere derived the legend, of which he made so glorious a use, that "a certain witch whom he had in great trust had told Macbeth that he should never be slain with man born of any woman, nor vanquished till the wood of Birnane came to the Castle of Dunsinane." From Holinshed, also, he acquired a general notion of the situation of this castle: "He builded a strong castle on the top of an high hill called Dunsinane, situate in Gowrie, ten miles from Perth, on such a proud height that standing there aloft a man might behold well near all the countries of Angus, Fife, Stirmond, and Erndale, as it were lying underneath him." The propinquity of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane is indicated only in the chronicler by the circumstance that Malcolm rested there the night before the battle, and on the morrow marched to Dunsinane, every man "bearing a bough of some tree or other of that wood in his hand." The com-

manding position of Dunsinane, as described by the chronicler, is strictly adhered to by the poet:—

> "As I did stand my watch upon the hill
> I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought
> The wood began to move."

But the poet has a particularity which the historian has not:—

> "Within this three mile may you see it coming;
> I say, a moving grove."

This minuteness sounds like individual local knowledge. The Dunsinane Hills form a long range extending in a north-easterly direction from Perth to Glamis. The castle of the "thane of Glamis" has been made a traditionary scene of the murder of Duncan. Birnam Hill is to the north-west of Perth; and between the two elevations there is a distance of some twelve miles, formed by the valley of the Tay. But Birnam Hill and Birnam Wood might have been essentially different spots two centuries and a half ago. The plain is now under tillage; but even in the time of Shakspere it might have been for the most part woodland, extending from Birnam Hill to within four or five miles of Dunsinane; distinguished from Birnam Hill as Birnam Wood. At the distance of three or four miles it was "a moving grove." It was still nigher to Dunsinane when Malcolm exclaimed,

> "Now, near enough, your leafy screens throw down."

These passages in the play might have been written without any local knowledge, but they certainly do not exhibit any local ignorance. It has been said, "The probability

[Dunsinane.]

of Shakspeare's ever having been in Scotland is very remote. It should seem by his uniformly accenting the name of this spot Dunsináne, that he could not possibly have taken it from the mouths of the country-people who as uniformly accent it Dunsínnan."* This is not quite accurate, as Dr. Drake has pointed out. Shakspere has this passage:—

> "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsínane hill
> Shall come against him."

Wintoun, in his "Chronicle," has both Dunsináne and Dunsínane. But we are informed by a gentleman who is devoted to the study of Scotch Antiquities, that there is every reason to believe that Dunsináne was the ancient pronunciation, and that Shakspere was consequently right in making Dunsínane the exception to his ordinary method of accenting the word. So much for the topographical knowledge displayed in "Macbeth." Alone, it is scarcely enough to found an argument upon.

We proceed to the documentary part of this question.

The fortieth volume of the registers of the Town Council of Aberdeen contains the following entries:—

"Nono Octobris 1601.

"Ordinance to the dean of gild.

"The samen day The prouest Bailleis and counsall ordanis the svme of threttie tua merkis to be gevin to the Kingis serwandes presently in this burcht . . quha playes comedeis and staige playes Be reasoun they ar recommendit be his majesties speciall letter and hes played sum of their comedies in this burcht and ordanis the said svme to be payit to tham be the dean of gild quhilk salbe allowit in his comptis."

"22 Octr 1601.

"The Quhilk day Sir Francis Hospitall of Haulszie Knycht Frenschman being recommendit be his majistie to the Prouest Bailleis and Counsall of this brocht to be favorablie Interteneit with the gentilmen his majesties seruands efter specifeit quha war direct to this burcht be his majestie to accumpanie the said Frenshman being ane nobillman of France cumming only to this burcht to sie the towne and cuntrie the said Frenshman with the knightis and gentillmen folowing wer all ressauit and admittit Burgesses of Gild of this burcht quha gawe thair aithis in common form folowis the names of thame that war admittit burgesses

Sir Francis Hospitall of halzie knycht
Sir Claud Hamiltoun of Schawfeild knycht
Sir Johm Grahame of orkill knycht
Sir John Ramsay of Ester Baronie knycht
James Hay James Auchterlony Robert Ker James Schaw Thomas foster James Gleghorne Dauid Drummond Seruitors to his Majestie
Monsieur de Scheyne Monsieur la Bar Seruitours to the said Sir Francis
James Law
James Hamiltoun seruitour to the said Sir Claud
Archibald Sym Trumpeter
Laurence Fletcher comediane to his majestie.
Mr Dauid Wod
Johne Bronderstainis"

These documents present something more than the facts, that a company of players, specially recommended by the King, were paid a gratuity from the Corporation of Aberdeen for their performances in that town, one of them subsequently receiving the freedom of the borough. The provost, baillies, and council ordain that thirty-two marks should be given to the *King's servants* then in that borough, who played

* Stoddart's "Remarks on the Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland," 1801.

comedies and stage-plays. The circumstance that they are recommended by the King's special letter is not so important as the description of them as the King's servants. Thirteen days after the entry of the 9th of October, at which first period these servants of the King had played some of their comedies, Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty, is admitted a burgess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen —the greatest honour which the Corporation could bestow. He is admitted to this honour, in company with a nobleman of France visiting Aberdeen for the gratification of his curiosity, and recommended by the King to be favourably entertained; as well as with three men of rank, and others, who were directed by his Majesty to accompany "the said Frenchman." All the party are described in the document as knights and gentlemen.* We have to inquire, then, who was Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty? Assuredly the King had not in his service a company of Scotch players. In 1599 he had licensed a company of English comedians to play at Edinburgh. Fond as James was of theatrical exhibitions, he had not the means of gratifying his taste, except through the visits of English comedians. Scotland had no drama. Before the Reformation she had her Mysteries, as England had. The Moralities of Lyndsay, of which "The Satyre of the three Estaitis" is one of the most remarkable, were indeed dialogues, but in no sense of the word dramas. The biting humour, the fierce invectives, the gross obscenity which we find in "The Satyre of the Three Estaitis," were no doubt the characteristics of other popular exhibitions of the same period. But, taking that singular production as a specimen, they were scarcely so dramatic in their form and spirit as the contemporary productions in England of John Heywood, of which "The four P's" is a favourable example. "Philotus"—"Ane verie excellent and delectabill Treatise intitulit Philotvs, qvhairin we may persave the greit inconveniences that fallis out in the Marriage betvvene age and zouth"—belongs to a later period. It was first printed in 1603, and again in 1612, when it was entitled "a Comedy." The plot is founded upon one of the stories of Barnaby Rich, told by him in the collection from which Shakspere is supposed to have derived some hints for the conduct of the action in "Twelfth Night." The dialogue of "Philotus" is in verse, not deficient in spirit and harmony, but utterly undramatic—sometimes easy and almost refined, at others quaint and gross beyond all conception. The stanza with which the play opens will furnish some notion of the prevailing metre, and of the poetical tone, of this singular performance:

"O lustie luifsome lamp of licht,
Your bonynes, your bewtie bricht,
Your staitly stature trym and ticht,
With gesture graue and gude:
Your countenance, your cullour cleir,
Your lauching lips, your smyling cheir,
Your properties dois all appear,
My senses to illude."

Until William Alexander appeared in 1603 with his tragedy of "Darius," Scotland possessed no literature that could be called dramatic; and it may be doubted if even Alexander's "Historical Dialogues" can be properly called dramas. We may safely conclude that King James would have no Scottish company of players, because Scotland had no dramas to play.

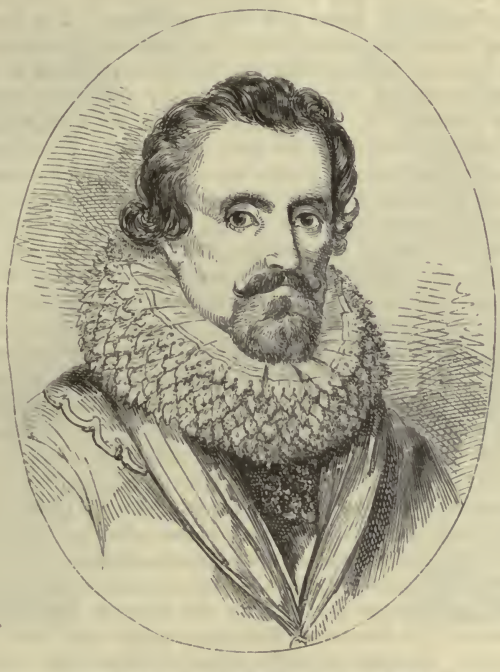
"Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty," was undoubtedly an Englishman;

* Archibald Sym, trumpeter, was a person of dignified occupation. He was no doubt the state-trumpeter, whose business it was to assist in proclaiming the royal commands to the people. In Scottish annals we find constant notices of certain acts of authority notified at Edinburgh "by open proclamation and sound of trumpet at the Cross."

and "the King's servants presently in this borough who play comedies and stage-plays" were as certainly English players. There are not many facts known by which we can trace the history of Lawrence Fletcher. He is not mentioned amongst "the names of the principal actors in all these plays," which list is given in the first folio edition of Shakspere; but he undoubtedly belonged to Shakspere's company. Augustine Phillips, who, by his will, in 1605, bequeathed a thirty-shilling piece of gold to his "fellow" William Shakspere, also bequeathed twenty shillings to his "fellow" Lawrence Fletcher. But there is more direct evidence than this of the connection of Fletcher with Shakspere's company. The patent of James I., dated at Westminster on the nineteenth of May, 1603, in favour of the players acting at the Globe, is headed "Pro Laurentio Fletcher et Willielmo Shakespeare & aliis;" and it licenses and authorises the performances of "Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillippes, John Hemings, Henrie Condel, William Sly, Robert Armin, Richard Cowly, and the rest of their associates." The connection in 1603 of Fletcher and Shakspere cannot be more distinctly established than by this document. Chalmers says that Fletcher "was placed before Shakspeare and Richard Burbage in King James's licence as much perhaps by accident as by design."* The Aberdeen Register is evidence against this opinion. Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty, is admitted to honours which are not bestowed upon the other King's servants who had acted plays in the borough of Aberdeen in 1601. Lawrence Fletcher is first named in the letters patent of 1603. It is evident, we think, that he was admitted a burgess of Aberdeen as the head of the company, and that he was placed first in the royal licence for the same reason. But there is a circumstance, we apprehend, set forth in the Aberdeen Registers which is not only important with reference to the question of Shakspere having visited Scotland, but which explains a remarkable event in the history of the stage. The company rewarded by the Corporation of Aberdeen on the 9th of October, 1601, were not only recommended by his Majesty's special letter, but they were the King's servants. Lawrence Fletcher, according to the second entry, was comedian to his Majesty. This English company, then, had received an honour from the Scottish King, which had not been bestowed upon them by the English Queen. They were popularly termed the Queen's players about 1590; but, subsequently, we find them invariably mentioned in the official entries as the Lord Chamberlain's servants. As the servants of the first officer of the Court, they had probably higher privileges than the servants of other noblemen; but they were not formally recognised as the Queen's servants during the remainder of Elizabeth's reign. In Gilbert Dugdale's "The Time Triumphant; declaring in briefe the arival of our Soveraigne Leidge Lord King James into England," printed in 1604, the author, after noticing that the King "dealt honours as freely to our nations as their hearts could wish," adds, "not only to the indifferent of worth and the worthy of honour did he freely deal about these causes; but to the mean gave grace: as taking to him the late Lord Chamberlain's servants, now the King's actors; the Queen taking to her the Earl of Worcester's servants, that are now her actors; the Prince their son, Henry Prince of Wales, full of hope, took to him the Earl of Nottingham his servants, who are now his actors; so that of Lords' servants they are now the servants of the King, the Queen, and Prince." Mr. Collier, in noticing the licence "Pro Laurentio Fletcher et Willielmo Shakespeare et aliis," says that the Lord Chamberlain's company "by virtue of this instrument, in which they are termed 'our servants,' became the King's players, and were so afterwards constantly distinguished."† But the instrument did not create Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others,

* "Apology," page 422. † "Annals of the Stage," vol. i., p. 348.

the King's servants ; it recognises them as the King's servants already appointed: "Know you that we, of our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, have licensed and authorised, and by these presents do license and authorise, these our servants," &c. They are licensed to use and exercise their art and faculty "as well for the recreation of our loving subjects as for our solace and pleasure, when we shall think good to see them." They are "to show and exercise publicly to their best commodity, when the infection of the plague shall decrease, within their now usual house called the Globe," as in all other places. The justices, mayors, sheriffs, and others to whom the letters patent are addressed, are called upon to aid and assist them, and to do them courtesies ; and the instrument thus concludes: "And also what further favour you shall show to these our servants for our sake we shall take kindly at your hands." The terms of this patent exhibit towards the players of the Globe a favour and countenance, almost an affectionate solicitude for their welfare, which is scarcely reconcilcable with a belief that they first became the King's players by virtue of this instrument. James arrived in London, at the Charter House, on the 7th of May, 1603. He then removed to the Tower, and subsequently to Greenwich on the 13th. The Privy Seal, directing the letters patent to Fletcher, Shakspere, and others, is dated from Greenwich on the 17th of May ; and in that document the exact words of the patent are prescribed. The words of the Privy Seal and of the patent undoubtedly imply some previous appointment of the persons therein named as the King's servants. It appears scarcely possible that during the three days which elaped between James taking up his residence at Greenwich, and the day on which the Privy Seal is issued, the Lord Chamberlain's servants, at the season of the plague, should have performed before the King, and have so satisfied him that he constituted them his own servants. It would at first seem improbable that amidst the press of business consequent upon the accession, the attention of the King should have been directed to the subject of players at all, especially in the selection of a company as his own servants, contrary to the precedent of the former reign. If these players had been the servants of Elizabeth, their appointment as the servants of James might have been asked as a matter of course; but certain players were at once to be placed above their professional brethren, by the King's own act, carried into effect within ten days after his arrival within his new metropolis. All these objections are removed when we refer to the facts opened to us by the council registers of Aberdeen. King James the Sixth of Scotland had recommended his servants to the magistrates of Aberdeen ; and Lawrence Fletcher, there can be no doubt, was one of those servants so recommended. The patent of James the First of England directed to Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others, eighteen months after the performances at Aberdeen, is directed to those persons as "our servants." It does not appoint them the King's servants, but recognises the appointment as already existing. Can there be a reasonable doubt that the appointment was originally made by the King in Scotland, and subsisted when the same King ascended the English throne ? Lawrence Fletcher was admitted a burgess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen as comedian to his Majesty, in company with other persons who were servitors to his Majesty. He received that honour, we may conclude, as the head of the company, also the King's servants. We know not how he attained this distinction amongst his fellows, but it is impossible to imagine that accident so favoured him in two instances. The King's servant who was most favoured at Aberdeen, and the King's servant who is first in the patent in 1603, was surely placed in that position by the voice of his fellows, the other King's servants. William Shakspere is named with him in a marked manner in the heading of the patent. Seven of their fellows are also named, as distinguished from "the rest of their associates." There can be no



[James the Sixth of Scotland and First of England.]

doubt of the identity of the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James VI. of Scotland, and the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James I. of England. Can we doubt that the King's servants who played comedies and stage plays in Aberdeen, in 1601, were, taken as a company, the King's servants who were licensed to exercise the art and faculty of playing, throughout all the realm, in 1603? If these points are evident, what reason have we to doubt that William Shakspere, the second named in the licence of 1603, was amongst the King's servants at Aberdeen in 1601? Every circumstance concurs in the likelihood that he was of that number recommended by the King's special letter; and his position in the licence, even before Burbage, was, we may well believe, a compliment to him who in 1601 had taught "our James" something of the power and riches of the English drama.

The circumstances which we have thus detailed give us, we think, warranty to conclude that the story of Macbeth might have been suggested to Shakspere upon Scottish ground; that the accuracy displayed in the local descriptions and allusions might have been derived from a rapid personal observation; and that some of the peculiarities of his witchcraft imagery might have been found in Scottish superstitions, and more especially in those which may have been rife at Aberdeen at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Is there anything to contradict the inferences which are justly to be deduced from the records which we have just described and commented upon? There is one contradiction which renders us more sceptical than any anti-

quarian objections. A writer whose sagacity is only equalled by his wondrous imaginative power, says, "It has been asked—was Shakspeare ever in Scotland. Never. There is not one word in this Tragedy ["Macbeth"] leading a Scotchman to think so—many showing he never had that happiness. Let him deal with our localities according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, as a prevailing poet. But let no man point out his dealings with our localities as proof of his having such knowledge of them as implies personal acquaintance with them gained by a longer or shorter visit in Scotland."* But it cannot be denied, we apprehend, that Shakspere's company was at Aberdeen in the autumn of 1601. There is nothing that we have found which can be opposed to the fair and natural inferences that belong to the registers of the Town Council. The records of the Presbytery of Aberdeen are wholly silent upon the subject of this visit of a company of players to their city. These records, on the 25th of September, 1601, contain an entry regarding Lord Glamis—an entry respecting one of the many deeds of violence for which Scotland was remarkable, when the strong hand so constantly attempted to defy the law: Mr. Patrick Johnson, it seems, had been killed by Lord Glamis, and the fact is here brought under the cognizance of the Presbytery. An entry of the 9th of October deals with Alexander Ceath [Keith], on a charge of adultery. Another of the 23rd of October relates to John Innis. Beyond the 5th of November, when there is another record, it would be unnecessary to seek for any minute regarding the players who were rewarded and honoured by the Town Council. There is no entry whatever on the subject.† If Shakspere's company were at Aberdeen—and to disprove it, it must be shown that Lawrence Fletcher who was the King of Scotland's comedian in 1601, was not the Lawrence Fletcher who was associated with Shakspere in the patent granted by James upon his accession in 1603—what absolute reason can there be for supposing that Shakspere was absent from his company upon so interesting an occasion as a visit to the Scottish King and Court? The extraordinary merits of the dramas of Shakspere might have been familiar to the King through books. Previous to 1601, there had been nine undoubted plays of Shakspere's published, which might readily have reached Scotland.‡ Essex and Southampton were in the habit of correspondence with James; and at the very hour when James officially knew of his accession to the crown of England, he dispatched an order from Holyrood House to the Council of State for the release of Southampton from the Tower. It is not likely that the Lord Chamberlain's servants would have taken the long journey to Scotland upon the mere chance of being acceptable to the Court. If they were desired to come, it is not probable that Shakspere would have been absent. It was his usual season of repose from his professional pursuits in London. The last duties to his father's memory might have been performed on the 8th of September, leaving abundant time to reach the Court, whether at Holyrood, or Stirling, or Linlithgow, or Falkland; to be enrolled amongst the servants who performed before the King; and subsequently to have been amongst those his fellows who received rewards on the 9th of October for their comedies and stage-plays at Aberdeen.§

* Christopher North, in "Blackwood," 1849.

† We consulted these documents, which are preserved in the fine Library of the Advocates at Edinburgh. We were assisted by very kind friends—Professor Spalding (who very early distinguished himself as a critic on Shakspere), and John Hill Burton, Esq. (who possesses the most complete knowledge of the treasures of that valuable library)—in searching for documents that could illustrate this question.

‡ There is a beautiful copy of the first edition of "Love's Labour's Lost," 1598, amongst Drummond's books, preserved apart in the library of the University of Edinburgh.

§ This argument is very briefly given in "Studies," page 355.

BOOK IV

[Jonson.]

CHAPTER I.

GLIMPSES OF SOCIETY.

About four years before the death of Elizabeth, there appeared a dramatic writer in London, who, though scarcely twenty-five years of age, had studied society under many aspects. He was a scholar, bred up by the most eminent teachers, amongst aristocratic companions; but his home was that of poverty and obscurity, and he had to labour with his hands for his daily bread. He delighted in walking not only amidst the open fields of ancient poetry and eloquence, but in all the by-places of antiquity, gathering flowers amongst the weeds with infinite toil: but he possessed

no merely contemplative spirit: he had high courage and ardent passions, and whether with the sword or the pen he was a dangerous antagonist. This humbly-born man, with the badge of the "hod and trowel" fixed on him by his enemies—twitted with ambling "by a play-waggon in the highway"—with a face held up to ridicule as being "like a rotten russet apple when it is bruised," or "punched full of eyelet-holes, like the cover of a warming pan"—described by himself as remarkable for

"His mountain belly and his rocky face"—

with "one eye lower than t'other, and bigger," as Aubrey has it—and, according to the same authority, "wont to wear a coat like a coachman's coat, with slits under the arm-pits;"—this uncouth being was for a quarter of a century the favourite poet of the Court,—one that wrote masques not only for two kings to witness, but for one to perform in,—the founder and chief ornament of clubs where the greatest of his age for wit, and learning, and rank, gathered round him as a common centre; but, above all, he was the rigid moralist, who spared no vice, who was fearless in his denunciation of public or private profligacy, who crouched not to power or riches, but who stood up in the worst of days a real man. The pictures which Jonson has left of his time are more full, more diversified, and more amusing, than those of any contemporary writer,—Dekker not excepted, for his range is not so wide. He possessed a combination of the power of acute and accurate observation with unrivalled vigour in the delineation of what he saw. Aubrey, one of the shrewdest as well as the most credulous of biographers, has a very sensible remark upon the characteristics of Shakspere's comedy, as compared with the writers after the Restoration. "His comedies will remain wit as long as the English tongue is understood, for that he handles *mores hominum;* now, our present writers reflect so much upon particular persons and coxcombeities, that twenty years hence they will not be understood." This is precisely the case with Jonson as compared with Shakspere; but he is on this account a far more valuable authority for what essentially belongs to periods and classes. Shakspere has purposely left this field uncultivated; but it is Jonson's absolute domain. Studied with care, as he must be to be properly appreciated, he presents to us an almost inexhaustible series of *Daguerreotypes,*—forms copied from the life, with absolute certainty, of the manners of three reigns,—when there was freedom enough for men to abandon themselves without disguise to what they called their *humours,* and the conflicts of opinion had not yet become so violent as to preclude the public satirist from attacking sects and parties. There is a peculiar interest, too, about Jonson and his writings, if we regard him as the representative of the literary class of his own day. In his hands the stage was to teach what the Essayists of a century afterwards were to teach. The age was to be exhibited; its vices denounced; its follies laughed at. Gifford has remarked that there is a singular resemblance between Benjamin Jonson and Samuel Johnson. Nothing can be more true; and the similarity is increased by the reflection that they are both of them essentially London men: for them there is no other social state. Of London they know all the strange resorts: they move about amongst the learned and the rich with a thorough independence and self-respect; but they know that there are other aspects of life worthy to be seen, and they study them in obscure places where less robust writers are afraid to enter. As it is our duty to present a brief general view of the "Times" of Shakspere, we may best illustrate them, however imperfectly, from the writings of Jonson.

We have said that Ben Jonson is essentially of London. He did not, like his illustrious namesake, walk into the great city from the midland country, and throw his huge bulk upon the town as if it were a wave to bear up such a leviathan.

Fuller traces him "from his long coats;" and from that poor dwelling "in Hartshorn Lane near Charing Cross" he sees him through "a private school in St. Martin's Church" into the sixth form at "Westminster." What wanderings must the bricklayer's stepson have had during those school-days, and in the less happy period when they were passed! And then, when the strong man came back from the Low Countries, and perhaps on one day was driven to the taverns and the playhouses by the restlessness of his genius, and on another ate the sweeter bread of manual labour, how thoroughly must he have known that town in which he was still to live for forty years; and how familiarly must all its localities have come unbidden into his mind! As his characters could only have existed in the precise half-century in which he himself lived, so they could only have moved in the identical places which form the background in these remarkable groups. We open "Every Man in his Humour:" Master Stephen dwells at Hogsden, but he despises the "archers of Finsbury and the citizens that come a-ducking to Islington ponds." We look upon the map of Elizabeth's time, and there we see Finsbury Field covered with trees and windmills; and we understand its ruralities, and picture to ourselves the pleasant meadows between the Archery-ground and Islington. But the dwellers at Hoxton have a long suburb to pass before they reach London. "I am sent for this morning by a friend in the Old Jewry to come to him; it is but crossing over the fields to Moorgate." The Old Jewry presented the attraction of "the Windmill" tavern; and near it dwelt Cob, the waterman, by the wall at the bottom of Coleman Street, "at the sign of the Water Tankard, hard by the Green Lattice." Some thirty years after this we have in "The Tale of a Tub" a more extended picture of suburban London. The characters move about in the fields near Pancridge (Pancras), to Holloway, Highgate, Islington, Kentish Town, Hampstead, St. John's Wood, Paddington, and Kilburn: Totten-Court is a mansion in the fields: a robbery is pretended to be committed in "the ways over the country" between Kentish Town and Hampstead Heath, and a warrant is granted by a "Marribone" justice. In London the peculiarities of the streets become as familiar to us as the names of the taverns. There is "a rare motion (puppet show) to be seen in Fleet Street,"* and "a new motion of the city of Nineveh with Jonas and the Whale at Fleet Bridge."† The Strand was the chief road for ladies to pass through in their coaches; and there Lafoole in the "Silent Woman" has a lodging, "to watch when ladies are gone to the china-houses, or the Exchange, that he may meet them by chance and give them presents." Cole-Harbour, in the Parish of All Hallows the Less, is not so genteel—it is a sanctuary for spendthrifts. Sir Epicure Mammon, in "The Alchymist," would buy up all the copper in Lothbury; and we hear of the rabbit-skins of Budge Row and the stinking tripe of Panyer Alley.‡ At the bottom of St. Martin's Lane was a nest of alleys (some remains of which existed within the last thirty years) the resort of infamy in every shape. Jonson calls them "the Straits," "where the quarrelling lesson is read," and the "seconds are bottle-ale and tobacco."§ The general characteristics of the streets before the fire are not forgotten. In "The Devil is an Ass" the Lady and her lover speak closely and gently from the windows of two contiguous buildings. Such are a few examples of the local proprieties which constantly turn up in Jonson's dramas.

The personal relations in which this great dramatist stood in regard to his literary compeers is not an unimportant chapter in the history of the social state. The influence of men of letters even upon their own age is always great; it is sometimes all-powerful. In Jonson's time the pulpit and the stage were the teachers and the inciters; and the stage, taken altogether, was an engine of great power, either for

* "The Fox." † "Every Man out of his Humour." ‡ "Bartholomew Fair." § Ibid.

good or evil. In the hands of Shakspere and Jonson it is impossible to over-estimate the good which it produced. The one carried men into the highest region of lofty poetry (and the loftier because it was comprehensible by all), out of the narrow range of their own petty passions and low gratifications: the other boldly lashed the follies of individuals and classes, sometimes with imprudence, but always with honesty. If others ministered to the low tastes and the intolerant prejudices of the multitude, Jonson was ever ready to launch a bolt at them, fearless of the consequences. No man ever laboured harder to uphold the dignity of letters, and of that particular branch in which his labour was embarked. He was ardent in all he did; and of course he made many enemies. But his friendship was as warm as his enmity. No man had more friends or more illustrious. He was the father of many sons, to use the affectionate phrase which indicated the relation between the great writer and his disciples. Jonson was always poor, often embarrassed; but his proper intellectual ascendancy over many minds was never doubted. Something of this ascendancy may be attributed to his social habits.

In the year 1599, when Henslowe, according to his records, was lending Benjamin Jonson twenty shillings, and thirty shillings, and other small sums, in earnest of this play and that—sometimes advanced to himself alone, oftener for works in which he was joined with others—he was speaking in his own person to the audiences of the time with a pride which prosperity could not increase or adversity subdue. In "Every Man out of his Humour," first acted in 1599, he thus delivers himself in the character of "Asper, the Presenter:"—

> "If any here chance to behold himself,
> Let him not dare to challenge me of wrong;
> For if he shame to have his follies known,
> First he should shame to act 'em: my strict hand
> Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe
> Squeeze out the humour of such spongy souls
> As lick up every idle vanity."

The spirit which dictated these lines was not likely to remain free from literary quarrels. Jonson was attacked in turn, or fancied he was attacked. In 1601 he produced "The Poetaster;" and in his "Apologetical Dialogue which was only once spoken upon the stage," he thus defends his motives for this supposed attack upon some of his dramatic brethren:—

> "Sure I am, three years
> They did provoke me with their petulant styles
> On every stage: and I at last, unwilling,
> But weary, I confess, of so much trouble,
> Thought I would try if shame could win upon 'em;
> And therefore chose Augustus Cæsar's times,
> When wit and arts were at their height in Rome,
> To show that Virgil, Horace, and the rest
> Of those great master-spirits, did not want
> Detractors then, or practisers against them:
> And by this line, although no parallel,
> I hop'd at last they would sit down and blush;
> But nothing I could find more contrary.
> And though the impudence of flies be great,
> Yet this has so provok'd the angry wasps,
> Or, as you said, of the next nest, the hornets,
> That they fly buzzing, mad, about my nostrils,
> And, like so many screaming grasshoppers
> Held by the wings, fill every ear with noise."

In "The Poetaster" Jonson characterises himself as Horace; and his enemy, Deme-

trius, says, "Horace is a mere sponge—nothing but humours and observations. He goes up and down sucking upon every society, and when he comes home squeezes himself dry again." This reminds one of Aubrey:—"Ben Jonson and he (Shakspere) did gather humours of men daily wherever they came." They used their observations, however, very differently; the one was the Raphael, the other the Teniers, of the drama. When we look at the noble spirit with which Jonson bore poverty, it is perhaps to be lamented that he was so impatient of censure. If the love of fame be

"The last infirmity of noble minds,"

the horror of ridicule or contempt is too often its companion. The feelings are mixed in the fine lines with which Jonson concludes the "Apologetical Dialogue:"—

"I, that spend half my nights, and all my days,
Here in a cell to get a dark, pale face,
To come forth with the ivy or the bays,
And in this age can hope no other grace—
Leave me! There's something come into my thoughts
That must and shall be sung high and aloof,
Safe from the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass's hoof."

Gifford has thus described the club at the Mermaid:—"About this time [1603] Jonson probably began to acquire that turn for conviviality for which he was afterwards noted. Sir Walter Raleigh, previously to his unfortunate engagement with the wretched Cobham and others, had instituted a meeting of *beaux esprits* at the Mermaid, a celebrated tavern in Friday Street. Of this club, which combined more talent and genius than ever met together before or since, our author was a member; and here for many years he regularly repaired with Shakspeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Cotton, Carew, Martin, Donne, and many others, whose names, even at this distant period, call up a mingled feeling of reverence and respect." Jonson has been accused of excess in wine; and certainly temperance was not the virtue of his age. Drummond, who puts down his conversations in a spirit of detraction says, "Drink was the element in which he lived." Aubrey tells us "he would many times exceed in drink; Canary was his beloved liquor." And so he tells us himself in his graceful poem "Inviting a Friend to Supper:"—

"But that which most doth take my muse and me
Is a pure cup of rich Canary wine,
Which is the Mermaid's now, but shall be mine."

But the rich Canary was to be used, and not abused:—

"Of this we will sup free, but moderately;
Nor shall our cups make any guilty men:
But at our parting we will be as when
We innocently met. No simple word,
That shall be utter'd at our mirthful board,
Shall make us sad next morning, or affright
The liberty that we'll enjoy to-night."

This is not the *principle* of intemperance, at any rate; nor were the associates of Jonson at the Mermaid such as mere sensual gratification would have allied in that band of friendship. They were not such companions as the unhappy Robert Greene, whose genius was eaten up by his profligacy, describes himself to have lived amongst:—"His company were lightly the lewdest persons in the land, apt for pilfery, perjury, forgery, or any villainy. Of these he knew the cast to cog at cards,

cozen at dice; by these he learned the legerdemains of nips, foysts, conycatchers, crossbyters, lifts, high lawyers, and all the rabble of that unclean generation of vipers; and pithily could he point out their whole courses of craft: so cunning was he in all crafts, as nothing rested in him almost but craftiness." This is an unhappy picture; and in that age, when the rewards of unprofessional scholars were few and uncertain, it is scarcely to be wondered that their morals sometimes yielded to their necessities. Jonson and Shakspere passed through the slough of the theatre without a stain. Their club meetings were not the feasts of the senses alone. The following verses by Jonson were inscribed over the door of the Apollo Room in the Devil Tavern:—

"Welcome all who lead or follow
To the oracle of Apollo:
Here he speaks out of his pottle,
Or the tripos, his tower bottle;
All his answers are divine,
Truth itself doth flow in wine.
Hang up all the poor hop-drinkers,
Cries old Sim, the king of skinkers;
He the half of life abuses
That sits watering with the Muses.
Those dull girls no good can mean us;
Wine—it is the milk of Venus,
And the poet's horse accounted:
Ply it, and you all are mounted.
'Tis the true Phœbean liquor,
Cheers the brains, makes wit the quicker;
Pays all debts, cures all diseases,
And at once three senses pleases.
Welcome all who lead or follow
To the oracle of Apollo!"

In the Apollo Room Jonson sat, the founder of the club, perhaps its dictator. One of his contemporary dramatists, Marmion, describes him in his presidential chair:—

"The boon Delphic god
Drinks sack, and keeps his Bacchanalia,
And has his incense, and his altars smoking,
And speaks in sparkling prophecies."

"The boon Delphic god" had his *Leges Convivales*, written in the purest Latinity, engraved in black marble over the chimney. These laws have been translated into very indifferent verse, to quote which would give an imperfect idea of their elegance and spirit. They were not laws for common boon-companions; but for the "Eruditi, urbani, hilares, honesti." The tavern has perished: it has long been absorbed by the all-devouring appetite of commerce. But its memory will be ever fresh, whilst the laws of its club record that *there* were elegance without expense, wit without malice, high converse without meddling with sacred things, argumentation without violence. If these were mingled with music and poetry, and sometimes accomplished women were present, and the dance succeeded to the supper, we must not too readily conclude that there was licence,—allurements for the careless, which the wise ought not to have presided over. We must not judge of the manners of another age by those of our own. Jonson was too severe a moralist to have laid himself open to the charge of being a public example of immorality.

Such, then, was the social life of the illustrious men of letters and the more tasteful of the aristocracy in the latter period of Shakspere's London life. But where did the great painters of manners "pick up humours daily?" Where did they find the classes assembled that were to be held up to ridicule and reproof? We open

Jonson's first great comedy, "Every Man in his Humour," and there in the list of characters we find "Captain Bobadill, a Paul's man." Adventurers like Bobadill were daily frequenters of Paul's. The middle aisle of the old cathedral was the resort of all the idle and profligate in London. The coxcomb here displayed his finery, and the cutpurse picked his pocket. Serving-men here came to find masters, and tradesmen to attract purchasers by their notices on the pillars. Jonson has, up and down, constant allusions to Paul's. It was here that, wrapped up in his old coachman's coat, he studied the fopperies in dress which were so remarkable a characteristic of his times. It was here, probably, that Jonson got the hint of Bobadill's boots worn over his silk stockings, and the jewel in his ear. Here, too, he heard the gingle of the silver spurs which the gallants wore in spite of the choristers, who had a vigilant eye to enforce the fine called spur-money. Here, too, he might have seen the "wrought shirt" of Fastidious Brisk, embroidered all over with fruits and flowers, which fashion the Puritans imitated by ornamenting their shirts with texts of Scripture. Here he saw the "gold cable hatband"—"the Italian cut work band"—"the embossed girdle"—and the "ruffle to the boot" of the same distinguished fop. The "mirror in the hat," and the "finger that hath the ruby," could not fail to be noticed in Paul's by the satirist. The "love-lock" and the "cut beard" were displayed in every variety that caprice and folly could suggest. Dekker has noted such minor follies of his age even with more assiduity than Jonson. He is confident in his powers; and claims to be a satirist by as indefeasible a title as that of his greater rival. In Paul's Walk, in the Mediterranean Aisle, he has noted one who walks there from day to day, even till lamp-light, for he is safe from his creditors. Another is waited upon by his tailor, who steps behind a pillar with his table-book to note the last fashion which hath made its appearance there, and to commend it to his worship's admiration. He has many a joke against the gallants of the theatre whom he has noted sitting on the stage in all the glory of their coxcombry—on the very rushes where the comedy is to dance, beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality. The proportionable leg, the white hand, the love-lock of the essenced fop, have none of them passed unmarked. The red beard artistically dyed according to the most approved fashion supplies many a laugh; especially if the wearer had risen to be gone in the middle of the scene, saluting his gentle acquaintance to the discomfiture of the mimics. He, above all, is quizzed who hoards up the play scraps upon which his lean wit most savouredly feeds. Equally familiar is the satirist with the ordinary. He tells of a most absolute gull that he has marked riding thither upon his Spanish jennet, with a French lacquey carrying his cloak, who having entered the public room walks up and down scornfully with a sneer and a sour face to promise quarrelling; who, when he does speak, discourses how often this lady has sent her coach for him, and how he has sweat in the tennis-court with that lord. An unfledged poet, too, he has marked, who drops a sonnet out of the large fold of his glove, which he at last reads to the company with a pretty counterfeit lothness. He has a story of the last gull whom he saw there, skeldered of his money at primero and hazard, who sat as patiently as a disarmed gentleman in the hands of the bailiffs. At the tavern he has drawn out a country gentleman that has brought his wife to town to learn the fashions, and see the tombs at Westminster, and the lions in the Tower; and is already glib with the names of the drawers, Jack and Will and Tom: the tavern is to him so delightful, with its suppers, its Canary, its tobacco, and its civil hostess at the bar, that it is odds but he will give up housekeeping. Above all, "the satirical rogue" is familiar with the habits of those who hear the chimes at midnight. He knows how they shun the waking watch and play tricks with the sleeping, and he hears the pretenders to gentility call aloud Sir Giles, or Sir Abraham, will you turn this way?

Every form of pretence is familiar to him. He has watched his gull critical upon new books in a stationer's shop, and has tracked him through all his vagaries at the tobacco ordinary, the barber's, the fence-school, and the dancing-school. Thomas Dekker is certainly one of those who gather humours from all men; but his wit is not of the highest or the most delicate character. He knows the town, and he makes the most of his knowledge.

The two great genera into which society was divided in Jonson's time were, the gentry and the citizens. During the law-terms London was full of the country squires and their families; who sometimes came up to town with the ostensible purpose of carrying on their law-suits, but more generally to spend some portion of that superfluous wealth which the country could not so agreeably absorb. The evil —if evil it were—grew to be so considerable that James, by proclamation, directed them to return to their own counties. But this, of course, was mere idle breath. Jonson, though the theatres might be supposed to gain by this influx of strangers, boldly satirized the improvidence and profligacy of the squires, whom he has no hesitation in denouncing as "country gulls," "who come up every term to learn to take tobacco and see new motions." He does this in the spirit of the fine song of the "Old and Young Courtier:"—

> "With a new fashion, when Christmas is drawing on,
> On a new journey to London straight we must all begone,
> And leave none to keep house but our new porter John,
> Who relieves the poor with a thump on the back with a stone,
> Like a young courtier," &c.

Jonson's rules for making a town gentleman out of a country clown are drawn from the life:—

> "First, to be an accomplished gentleman—that is, a gentleman of the time—you must give over housekeeping in the country, and live altogether in the city amongst gallants; where, at your first appearance, 't were good you turn'd four or five acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparel,—you may do it without going to a conjuror; and be sure you mix yourself still with such as flourish in the spring of the fashion, and are least popular [vulgar]: study their carriage and behaviour in all; learn to play at primero and passage, and ever (when you lose) have two or three peculiar oaths to swear by, that no man else swears: but, above all, protest in your play, and affirm, 'Upon your credit,' 'As you are a true gentleman,' at every cast: you may do it with a safe conscience, I warrant you. . . . . You must endeavour to feed cleanly at your ordinary, sit melancholy, and pick your teeth when you cannot speak; and when you come to plays be humourous, look with a good starched face, and ruffle your brow like a new boot, laugh at nothing but your own jests, or else as the noblemen laugh. That 's a special grace, you must observe. . . . . You must pretend alliance with courtiers and great persons: and ever, when you are to dine or sup in any strange presence, hire a fellow with a great chain (though it be copper it 's no matter) to bring you letters, feigned from such a nobleman, or such a knight, or such a lady."

All this is keen satire. It is directed against what has been the bane of English society up to the hour in which we write—pretence—the aping to be what we are not—the throwing aside our proper honours and happiness to thrust ourselves into societies which despise us, and to sacrifice our real good for fancied enjoyments which we ourselves feel to be worthless.

Turn we from the gentlemen to the citizens. The satire which we have transcribed is followed by a recommendation to get largely in debt amongst the "rich fellows that have the world, or the better part of it, sleeping in their counting houses." According to Jonson's picture in another comedy ("The Devil is an Ass") the citizens were as anxious to get the gentlemen in their books as the gentlemen to be

there. The following dialogue takes place between Gilthead, a goldsmith, and Plutarchus, his son :—.

"*Plu.* O but, good father, you trust too much.
Gilt. Boy, boy,
We live by finding fools out to be trusted.
Our shop-books are our pastures, our corn-grounds ;
We lay 'em open, for them to come into ;
And when we have them there we drive them up
Into one of our two pounds, the compters, straight ;
And this is to make you a gentleman !
We citizens never trust, but we do cozen :
For if our debtors pay, we cozen them ;
And if they do not, then we cozen ourselves.
But that 's a hazard every one must run
That hopes to make his son a gentleman !
Plu. I do not wish to be one, truly, father.
In a descent or two we come to be
Just in their state, fit to be cozen'd like them ;
For, since the gentry scorn the city so much,
Methinks we should in time, holding together,
And matching in our own tribes, as they say,
Have got an act of common-council for it,
That we might cozen them out of rerum natura.
Gilt. Ay, if we had an act first to forbid
The marrying of our wealthy heirs unto them,
And daughters with such lavish portions :
That confounds all.
Plu. And makes a mongrel breed, father.
And when they have your money, then they laugh at you,
Or kick you down the stairs. I cannot abide them :
I would fain have them cozen'd, but not trusted."

The age in which Jonson wrote was remarkable for two things which generally go together—boundless profusion, and the most extravagant desire for sudden wealth. The poet has left us two of the most vivid personifications of an insane abandonment to the longing for boundless riches that were ever conceived by a deep philosophical spirit working upon actual observation. Sir Epicure Mammon in the "Alchymist," is a character for "all time." The cheating mysteries by which his imagination was inflamed have long ceased to have their dupes ; but there are delusions in the every-day affairs of life quite as exciting, perhaps more dangerous. The delights which this unfortunate dupe proposes to himself, when he shall have obtained the philosopher's stone, are strong illustrations indeed of the worthlessness of ill-employed riches :—

"We will be brave, Puffe, now we have the med'cine.
My meat shall all come in in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.
The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,
Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolv'd pearl,
Apicius' diet 'gainst the epilepsy :
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
My footboy shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys : I myself will have
The beards of barbels serv'd instead of salads ;
Oil'd mushrooms ; and the swelling unctious paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Dress'd with an exquisite and poignant sauce ;
For which, I 'll say unto my cook, There 's gold ;
Go forth, and be a knight."

And then comes the little tobacconist, Abel Drugger, who "this summer will be of the clothing of his company;" and he would give a crown to the Alchymist to receive back a fortune. This satire, it may be objected, is not permanent, because we have no alchymy now; but the passion which gave the alchymists their dupes is permanent: and Jonson has exhibited another mode in which it sought its gratification, which comes somewhat nearer to our own times. The Norfolk Squire of "The Devil is an Ass" meets with a projector—one who pretends to influence at court to obtain monopolies—an "undertaker," who makes men's fortunes without the advance of a penny, except a mere trifle of a ring or so by way of present to the great lady who is to procure the patent. But let the projector speak for himself:—

"He shall not draw
A string of 's purse; I 'll drive his patent for him.
We 'll take in citizens, commoners, and aldermen,
To bear the charge, and blow them off again,
Like so many dead flies, when it is carried.
The thing is for recovery of drown'd land,
Whereof the crown 's to have a moiety,
If it be owner; else the crown and owners
To share that moiety, and the recoverers
To enjoy the t'other moiety for their charge.
Eng. Throughout England?
Meer. Yes; which will arise
To eighteen millions—seven the first year:
I have computed all, and made my survey
Unto an acre."

The dupe thus recounts his great fortunes to his wife:—

"Wife, such a man, wife!
He has such plots! he will make me a duke!
No less, by heaven! six mares to your coach, wife!
That 's your proportion! and your coachman bald,
Because he shall be bare enough. Do not you laugh;
We are looking for a place, and all, in the map,
What to be of. Have faith—be not an infidel.
You know I am not easy to be gull'd.
I swear, when I have my millions, else, I 'll make
Another duchess, if you have not faith.
Mrs. Fitz. You 'll have too much, I fear, in these false spirits.
Fitz. Spirits! O, no such thing, wife; wit, mere wit.
This man defies the devil and all his works;
He does 't by engine, and devices, he!
He has his winged ploughs, that go with sails,
Will plough you forty acres at once! and mills
Will spout you water ten miles off! All Crowland
Is ours, wife: and the fens, from us, in Norfolk,
To the utmost bounds in Lincolnshire! we have view'd it,
And measur'd it within all, by the scale:
The richest tract of land, love, in the kingdom!
There will be made seventeen or eighteen millions,
Or more, as 't may be handled! so therefore think,
Sweet-heart, if thou hast a fancy to one place
More than another, to be duchess of,
Now name it; I will have 't, whate'er it cost,
(If 't will be had for money,) either here,
Or in France, or Italy.
Mrs. Fitz. You have strange phantasies!"

Is this satire obsolete?

But there is another form of the passion whose permanency and universality cannot be denied. What the victims of gaming propose to themselves Jonson has delineated with inimitable humour :—

> "There 's a young gentleman
> Is born to nothing—forty marks a year,
> Which I count nothing :—he is to be initiated,
> And have a fly of the doctor. He will win you,
> By unresistible luck, within this fortnight,
> Enough to buy a barony. They will set him
> Upmost, at the groom-porters, all the Christmas :
> And for the whole year through, at every place
> Where there is play, present him with the chair;
> The best attendance, the best drink ; sometimes
> Two glasses of Canary, and pay nothing ;
> The purest linen, and the sharpest knife ;
> The partridge next his trencher.
> You shall have your ordinaries bid for him,
> As playhouses for a poet ; and the master
> Pray him aloud what dish he affects,
> Which must be butter'd shrimps : and those that drink
> To no mouth else will drink to his as being
> The goodly president mouth of all the board."

A general appetite for luxurious fare appears to have been one of the most prevailing vices, both in the Court and in the City in these days. In the beginning of the reign of James I. London was one universal academy for *gourmands* and *gourmets*. The cooks, according to Jonson, were infected with principles that in an earlier age of the Reformation would have consigned them to the stake :—

> "Where have you greater atheists than your cooks?"

But in the more tolerant age of James, the master-cooks, whose atheism (if this quality be not a mere scandal of the poet) was derived with their professional knowledge from "the world abroad"—for travel was then necessary to make an accomplished cook — cooks were then personages that the great delighted to honour :—

> "A master-cook ! why he 's the man of men,
> For a professor ! he designs, he draws,
> He paints, he carves, he builds, he fortifies,
> Makes citadels of curious fowl and fish :
> Some he dry-ditches, some moats round with broths ;
> Mounts marrow-bones ; cuts fifty-angled custards ;
> Rears bulwark pies ; and, for his outer works,
> He raiseth ramparts of immortal crust ;
> And teacheth all the tactics at one dinner.
> . . . . .
> He is an architect, an engineer,
> A soldier, a physician, a philosopher,
> A general mathematician !"

The passage in the "Alchymist" in which Jonson pours out his learning in describing the rare but somewhat nasty dishes of ancient cookery, is a gorgeous piece of verse. We doubt whether "dormice," and "camels' heels," and the "beards of barbels," and "oiled mushrooms," would really be so successful as the performances of the maître de cuisine to the Maréchal Strozzi, who, at the seige of Leith, according to Monsieur Beaujeu, "made out of the hind quarter of one salted horse forty-five *couverts*, that the English and Scottish officers and nobility, who had the

honour to dine with Monseigneur upon the rendition, could not tell what the devil any one of them were made upon at all." The real professors of that day, according to the recommendation which Howell gives of one of them in 1630, could "marinate fish," "make jellies," were "excellent for piquant sauce and the haugou," were "passing good for an olla," understood "larding of meat after the mode of France," and decorated their victims with "chains of sausages." With these refinements prevailing amongst us two centuries ago, it is lamentable to think how we retrograded to the Saxon barbarism of sirloins and suet-dumplings in the days of George III.

Gifford has remarked that "Shakspere is the only one of the dramatic writers of the age of James who does not condescend to notice tobacco; all the others abound in allusions to it." In Jonson we find tobacco in every place—in Cob the waterman's house, and in the Apollo Club-room—on the stage, and at the ordinary. The world of London was then divided into two classes—the tobacco-lovers and the tobacco-haters. Jonson has made Bobadill speak the exaggerated praise of the one class: "I have been in the Indies, where this herb grows, where neither myself nor a dozen gentlemen more of my knowledge have received the taste of any other nutriment in the world for the space of one-and-twenty weeks, but the fume of this simple only: therefore, it cannot be but 't is most divine." Cob the waterman, on the other hand, represents the denouncers of the weed: "Odds me, I marle what pleasure or felicity they have in taking this roguish tobacco! It 's good for nothing but to choke a man, and fill him full of smoke and embers: there were four died out of one house last week with taking of it, and two more the bell went for yesternight." King James I., in his celebrated "Counterblast to Tobacco," is an imitator of Master Cob, for he raises a bugbear of "an unctuous and oily kind of soot found in some great tobacco-takers that after their death were opened." The King could not write down tobacco, even with Joshua Sylvester for an ally; who in his poem entitled "Tobacco Battered, and the Pipes Shattered," informs us that—

> "Of all the plants that Tellus' bosom yields,
> In groves, glades, gardens, marshes, mountains, fields,
> None so pernicious to man's life is known
> As is tobacco, saving hemp alone."

In the old play called "Jack Drum's Entertainment," one of the characters says, "I have followed ordinaries this twelvemonths, only to find a fool that had lands, or a fellow that would talk treason, that I might beg him." Garrard, in his letters to Lord Strafford, communicates a bit of news to his patron, which not only illustrates the unprincipled avarice of the courtiers—down almost to the time when a national convulsion swept this and other abominations away with much that was good and graceful—but which story is full of a deep tragic interest. An old usurer dies in Westminster; his will is opened, and all the property—the coin, the plate, the jewels, and the bonds—all is left to his man-servant. The unhappy creature goes mad amidst his riches; and there is but one thing thought of at court for a week—who is to be successful in begging him. Elizabeth had the merit of abolishing the more hateful practice of begging concealed lands, that is such lands as at the dissolution of the monasteries had privily got into the possession of private persons. There was not a title in the kingdom that was thus safe from the rapacity of the begging courtiers. But, having lost this prey, they displayed a new ability for the discovery of treason and treasonable talk. In the "Poetaster," written in 1601, Jonson does not hesitate to speak out boldly against this abominable practice. The characters in the following dialogue are Lupus, Cæsar, Tucca, and Horace; and,

as we have already mentioned, Jonson himself was designated under the name of Horace :—

"*Lup.* A libel, Cæsar ; a dangerous, seditious libel ; a libel in picture.
Cæsar. A libel !
Lup. Ay ; I found it in this Horace his study, in Mecænas his house here ; I challenge the penalty of the laws against them.
Tuc. Ay, and remember to beg their land betimes ; before some of these hungry court-hounds scent it out.
Cæsar. Show it to Horace : ask him if he know it.
Lup. Know it ! his hand is at it, Cæsar.
Cæsar. Then 't is no libel.
Hor. It is the imperfect body of an emblem, Cæsar, I began for Mecænas.
Lup. An emblem ! right : that 's Greek for a libel. Do but mark how confident he is.
Hor. A just man cannot fear, thou foolish tribune ;
Not, though the malice of traducing tongues,
The open vastness of a tyrant's ear,
The senseless rigour of the wrested laws,
Or the red eyes of strain'd authority,
Should, in a point, meet all to take his life :
His innocence is armour 'gainst all these."

Soon after the accession of James, Jonson himself went to prison for a supposed libel against the Scots in "Eastward Ho ;" in the composition of which comedy he assisted Chapman and Marston. They were soon pardoned : but it was previously reported that their ears and noses were to be slit. Jonson's mother, at an entertainment which he made on his liberation, "drank to him, and showed him a paper which she designed, if the sentence had taken effect, to have mixed with his drink, —and it was strong and hasty poison." Jonson, who tells this story himself, says, "to show that she was no churl, she designed to have first drunk of it herself." This is a terrible illustration of the ways of despotism. Jonson was pardoned, probably through some favouritism. Had it been otherwise, the future laureat of James would have died by poison in a wretched prison, and that poison given by his mother. Did the bricklayer's wife learn this terrible stoicism from her classical son ? Fortunately there was in the world at that day, as there is now, a higher spirit to make calamity endurable than that of mere philosophy ; and Jonson learnt this in sickness and old age. After he had become a favourite at court he still lost no proper occasion of lashing the rapacious courtiers. If a riot took place in a house, and manslaughter was committed, the house became a deodand to the Crown, and was begged as usual. In "The Silent Woman," first acted in 1609, one of the characters says, "O, sir, here hath like to have been murder since you went ; a couple of knights fallen out about the bride's favours : we were fain to take away their weapons ; your house had been begged by this time else." To the question, "For what ?" comes the sarcastic answer, "For manslaughter, sir, *as being accessary.*"

The universal example of his age made Jonson what we should now call a court flatterer. Elizabeth—old, wrinkled, capricious, revengeful—was "the divine Cynthia." But Jonson compounded with his conscience for flattering the Queen, by satirizing her court with sufficient earnestness ; and this, we dare say, was not in the least disagreeable to the Queen herself. In "Cynthia's Revels" we have a very *bizarre* exhibition of the fantastic gallantry, the absurd coxcombities, the pretences to wit, which belonged to lords in waiting and maids of honour. Affectation here wears her insolent as well as her "sickly mien." *Euphuism* was not yet extinct ; and so the gallant calls his mistress "my Honour," and she calls him "her Ambition." But this is small work for a satirist of Jonson's turn ; and he boldly denounces "pride and ignorance" as "the two essential parts of the courtier." "The ladies and

gallants lie languishing upon the rushes;" and this is a picture of the scenes in the antechambers:—

"There stands a neophyte glazing of his face,
Preening his clothes, perfuming of his hair,
Against his idol enters; and repeats,
Like an imperfect prologue, at third music,
His parts of speeches, and confederate jests,
In passion to himself. Another swears
His scene of courtship over; bids, believe him,
Twenty times ere they will; anon, doth seem
As he would kiss away his hand in kindness;
Then walks off melancholic, and stands wreath'd
As he were pinn'd up to the arras, thus.

. . . . .

Then fall they in discourse
Of tires and fashions; how they must take place;
Where they may kiss, and whom; when to sit down,
And with what grace to rise: if they salute,
What court'sy they must use: such cobweb stuff
As would enforce the common'st sense abhor
Th' Arachnean workers."

The dramatist has bolder delineations of profligacy and ambition—portraits in which the family likeness of two centuries and a half ago may yet be traced, if we make due allowances for the differences between the antique ruff and the costume of our unpicturesque days:—

"Here stalks me by a proud and spangled sir,
That looks three handfuls higher than his foretop;
Savours himself alone, is only kind
And loving to himself; one that will speak
More dark and doubtful than six oracles;
Salutes a friend as if he had a stitch;
Is his own chronicle, and scarce can eat
For registering himself; is waited on
By ninnies, jesters, panders, parasites,
And other such-like prodigies of men.
He pass'd, appears some mincing marmoset
Made all of clothes and face; his limbs so set
As if they had some voluntary act
Without man's motion, and must move just so
In spite of their creation: one that weighs
His breath between his teeth, and dares not smile
Beyond a point, for fear t' unstarch his look;
Hath travell'd to make legs, and seen the cringe
Of several courts and courtiers; knows the time
Of giving titles, and of taking walls;
Hath read court commonplaces; made them his:
Studied the grammar of state, and all the rules
Each formal usher in that politic school
Can teach a man. A third comes, giving nods
To his repenting creditors, protests
To weeping suitors, takes the coming gold
Of insolent and base ambition,
That hourly rubs his dry and itchy palms;
Which grip'd, like burning coals, he hurls away
Into the laps of bawds and buffoons' mouths.
With him there meets some subtle Proteus, one
Can change and vary with all forms he sees;
Be anything but honest; serves the time;
Hovers betwixt two factions, and explores

The drifts of both, which, with cross face, he bears
To the divided heads, and is receiv'd
With mutual grace of either."

It was in such a state of society as this—a transition state, in which the contests of classes had ceased to be a contest of physical power—a condition in which "the age is grown so piiked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe,"—an age of separation, when tyranny had lost much of its force, and the weak had also surrendered its partial protection,—that Shakspere lived in his later years. They were his years of philosophy. He had seen the hollowness of "the ignorant present" and threw himself into the universal.

[Thomas Dekker.]

[Hall of the Middle Temple.]

CHAPTER II.

LABOURS AND REWARDS.

"At our feast we had a play called 'Twelve Night; or, What you Will,' much like the 'Comedy of Errors,' or 'Menechmus' in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called 'Inganni.' A good practise in it to make the steward believe his lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfayting a letter, as from a lady, in generall termes telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gestures, inscribing his apparaile, &c., and then when he came to practise, making him beleeve they tooke him to be mad." The student of the Middle Temple, whose little diary, after snugly lying amongst the Harleian Manuscripts, now in the British

Musuem, unnoticed for two centuries and a quarter, luckily turned up to give us one authentic memorial of a play of Shakspere's, is a facetious and gossiping young gentleman, who appears to have mixed with actors and authors, recording the scandal which met his ear with a diligent credulity. The 2nd of February, 1602, was the Feast of the Purification, which feast and All-Hallown Day, according to Dugdale, "are the only feasts in the whole year made purposely for the Judges and Serjeants of this Society, but of later time divers noblemen have been mixed with them." The order of entertainment on these occasions is carefully recorded by the same learned antiquary.* The scarlet robes of the Judges and Serjeants, the meat carried to the table by gentlemen of the house under the bar, the solemn courtesies, the measures led by the Ancient with his white staff, the call by the reader at the cupboard "to one of the gentlemen of the bar, as he is walking or dancing with the rest, to give the Judges a song," the bowls of hypocras presented to the Judges with solemn congees by gentlemen under the bar,—all these ceremonials were matter of grave arrangement according to the most exact precedents. But Dugdale also tells us of "Post Revels performed by the better sort of the young gentlemen of the Society, with galliards, corantos, and other dances; or else with stage plays." The historian does not tell us whether the stage plays were performed by the young gentlemen of the Society, or by the professional players. The exact description which the student gives of the play of "Twelfth Night" would lead us to believe that it had not been previously familiar to him. It was not printed. The probability therefore is that it was performed by the players, and by Shakspere's company. The vicinity of the Blackfriars would necessarily render the members of the two Societies well acquainted with the dramas of Shakspere, and with the poet himself. There would be other occasions than the feast days of the Society that Shakspere would be found amidst those Courts. Amongst "the solemn temples" which London contained, no one would present a greater interest than that ancient edifice in which he might have listened, when a young man, to the ablest defender of the Church which had been founded upon the earlier religion of England; one who did not see the wisdom of wholly rejecting all ceremonials consecrated by habit and tradition; who eloquently wrote—"Of Law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world: all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power."† It was in the spirit of this doctrine that Shakspere himself wrote—

> "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre,
> Observe degree, priority, and place,
> Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
> Office, and custom, in all line of order."‡

Dugdale's "Origines" was published six years after the Restoration. He speaks of the solemn revels of Inns of Court, with reference to their past and to their existing state. They had wont to be entertained with Post Revels, which had their dances and their stage plays. This was before the domination of the Puritans, when stage plays and dancing were equally denounced as "the very works, the pomps, inventions, and chief delights of the devil."§ There is a passage in Dugdale which shows how the revels at the Inns of Court gradually changed their character according to the prevailing opinions:—"When the last measure is dancing, the Reader at the Cupboard calls to one of the Gentlemen of the Bar, as he is walking or dancing with

* "Origines Juridiciales," p. 205. † Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book I.
‡ "Troilus and Cressida," Act I., Scene III. § Prynne's "Histrio-Mastix."

[Interior of the Temple Church.]

the rest, to give the Judges a *song:* who forthwith begins the first line of any *psalm* as he thinks fittest; after which all the rest of the company follow, and sing with him." This is very like the edifying practice of the Court of Francis I., where the psalms of Clement Marot were sung to a fashionable jig, or a dance of Poitou.* Shakspere had good authority when he made the clown say of his three-man songmen, "They are most of them means and basses: but one Puritan amongst them, and he sings psalms to hornpipes."† This is one of the few allusions which Shakspere has to that rising sect, which in a few years was to become the dominant power in the state. Ben Jonson attacks them again and again with the most bitter indignation, and the coarsest satire.‡ The very hardest gird which Shakspere has at them is contained in the gentle reproof of Sir Toby to the Steward, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" In this very scene of "Twelfth Night" he ridicules the unreasoning hostility with which the Puritans themselves were assailed by the ignorant multitude. Sir Toby asks to be told something of the Steward:—

> "*Mar.* Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan.
> *Sir And.* O, if I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog.
> *Sir Toby.* What, for being a Puritan? thy exquisite reason, dear knight?
> *Sir And.* I have no exquisite reason for 't, but I have reason good enough."

* See Warton's "History of English Poetry," Section xlv.
† "Winter's Tale," Act iv., Scene ii. ‡ See "The Alchymist," and "Bartholomew Fair."

This is in the best spirit of toleration, which cannot endure that any body of men should be persecuted for their opinions, and especially by those who will show no reason for their persecution but that they "have reason good enough."

In May, 1602, Shakspere made a large addition to his property at Stratford by the purchase, from William and John Combe, for the sum of three hundred and twenty pounds, of one hundred and seven acres of arable land in the town of Old Stratford. The indenture, which is in the possession of Mr. Wheler of Stratford, is dated the 1st of May, 1602.* The conveyance bears the signatures of the vendors of the property. But although it concludes in the usual form, "The parties to these presents having interchangeably set to their hands and seals," the counterpart (also in the possession of Mr. Wheler) has not the hand and seal of the purchaser of the property described in the deed as "William Shakespere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the countie aforesaide, Gentleman." The counterpart is not signed, and the piece of wax which is affixed to it is unimpressed with any seal. The property was delivered to Gilbert Shakspere to the use of William. Gilbert was two years and a half younger than William, and in all likelihood was the cultivator of the land which the poet thus bought, or assisted their father in the cultivation.

We collect from this document that William Shakspere was not at Stratford on the 1st of May, 1602, and that his brother Gilbert was his agent for the payment of the three hundred and twenty pounds paid "at and before the sealing" of the conveyance. In the following August the Lord Chamberlain's company performed "Othello" in the house of the Lord Keeper at Harefield. The accounts of the large expenditure on this occasion, in the handwriting of Sir Arthur Mainwaring, were discovered by Mr. Collier amongst the "Egerton Papers," and they contain the following entry:—

> "6 August, 1602. Rewardes to the vaulters, players, and dauncers. Of this x^{li} to Burbidge's players for Othello, $lxiiij^{li}$ $xviij^{s}$. x^{d}." †

The Queen came to Harefield on the 31st of July, and remained there during the 1st and 2nd of August. In those days Harefield Place was "a fair house standing on the edge of the hill, the river Coln passing near the same through the pleasant meadows and sweet pastures, yielding both delight and profit." This is Norden's description, a little before the period of Elizabeth's visit. The Queen was received, after the usual quaint fashion of such entertainments, with a silly dialogue between a bailiff and a dairymaid, as she entered the domain; and the house welcomed her with an equally silly colloquy between Place and Time. The Queen must have been somewhat better pleased when a copy of verses was delivered to her in the morning, beginning

> "Beauty's rose, and virtue's book,
> Angel's mind and angel's look."

The weather, we learn from the same verses, was unpropitious:

> "Only poor St. Swithin now
> Doth hear you blame his cloudy brow."

* The document, which contains nothing remarkable in its clauses, is given in Mr. Wheler's "History of Stratford-upon-Avon."

† This important entry was first published by Mr. Collier in his "New Particulars regarding the Works of Shakespeare," 1836. Mr. Collier in the same tract publishes "a poetical relic," of which he says, "Although I believe it to be his, I have some hesitation in assigning it to Shakespeare." This copy of verses, without date or title, found amongst the same papers, bears the signature W. Sh. or W. Sk. (Mr. Collier is doubtful which). If the verses contained a single line which could not be produced by any one of the "mob of gentlemen who write with ease," we would venture to borrow a specimen.

Some great poet was certainly at work upon this occasion, but not Shakspere.* It was enough for him to present the sad story of

"The gentle lady married to the Moor."

Another was to come within some thirty years who should sing of Harefield with the power of a rare fancy working upon classical models, and who thus makes the Genius of the Wood address a noble audience in that sylvan scene:—

"For know, by lot from Jove I am the Power
Of this fair wood, and live in oaken bower,
To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove
With ringlets quaint, and wanton windings wove.
And all my plants I save from nightly ill
Of noisome winds, and blasting vapours chill:
And from the boughs brush off the evil dew,
And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue,
Or what the cross dire-looking planet smites,
Or hurtful worm with canker'd venom bites.
When evening gray doth rise, I fetch my round
Over the mount, and all this hallow'd ground;

[Harefield.]

* These verses, with other particulars of the entertainment, were first published from an original manuscript in Nicholls's "Progresses of Queen Elizabeth."

And early, ere the odorous breath of morn
Awakes the slumb'ring leaves, or tassel'd horn
Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,
Number my ranks, and visit every sprout
With puissant words, and murmurs made to bless."

Doubly honoured Harefield! Though thy mansion has perished, yet are thy groves still beautiful. Still thy summit looks out upon a fertile valley, where the gentle river wanders in silent beauty. But thy woods and lawns have a charm which are wholly their own.—Here the "Othello" of William Shakspere was acted by his own company; here is the scene of the "Arcades" of John Milton.

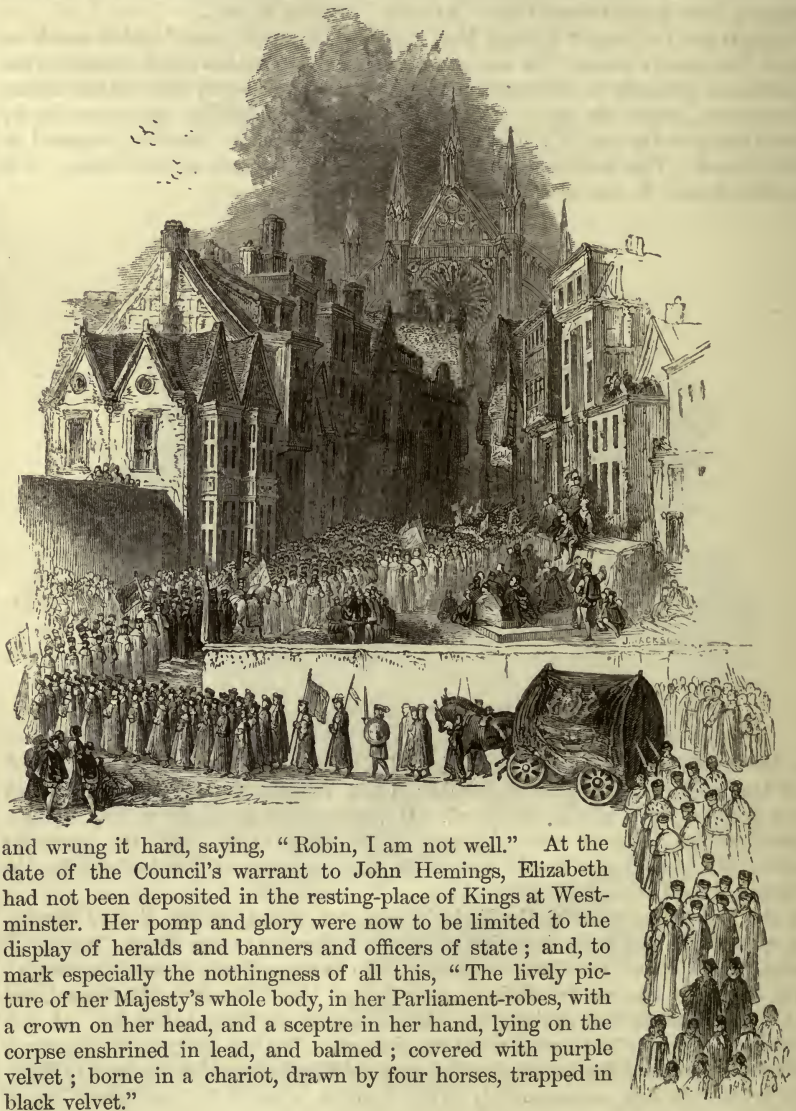
Amongst the few papers rescued from "time's devouring maw" which enable us to trace Shakspere's career with any exactness, there is another which relates to the acquisition of property in the same year. It is a copy of Court Roll for the Manor of Rowington, dated the 28th of September, 1602, containing the surrender by Walter Getley to the use of William Shakspere of a house in Stratford, situated in Walker Street. This tenement was opposite Shakspere's house of New Place. It is now taken down; it was in existence a few years ago.

[House in Walker Street.]

This document, which is in the possession of Mr. Hunt, the town-clerk of Stratford, shows that at the latter end of September, 1602, William Shakspere, the purchaser of this property, was not at Stratford. It could not legally pass to him, being a copyhold, till he had done suit and service in the Lord's Court; and the surrender therefore provides that it should remain in the possession of the lord till he, the purchaser, should appear.

In the September of 1602, the Earl of Worcester, writing to the Earl of Shrewsbury, says, "We are frolic here in Court, much dancing in the Privy Chamber of country-dances before the Queen's Majesty, who is exceedingly pleased therewith." In the December she was entertained at Sir Robert Cecil's house in the Strand, and some of the usual devices of flattering mummery were exhibited before her. A few months saw a period to the frolic and the flattery. The last entry in the books of the Treasurer of the Chamber during the reign of Elizabeth, which pertains to Shakspere, is the following;—melancholy in the contrast between the Candlemas-Day of

1603, the 2nd of February, and the following 24th of March, when Elizabeth died: —"To John Hemynges and the rest of his companie, servaunts to the Lorde Chamberleyne, uppon the Councells Warraunte, dated at Whitehall the xxth o Aprill, 1603, for their paines and expences in presentinge before the Queenes M^tie twoe playes, the one uppon St. Stephens day at nighte, and thother upon Candlemas day at night, for ech of which they were allowed, by way of her Ma^ts rewarde, tenne poundes, amounting in all to xx^li." The late Queen's Majesty! Before she had seen the play on Candlemas-day, at night, she had taken Sir Robert Carey by the hand,



and wrung it hard, saying, "Robin, I am not well." At the date of the Council's warrant to John Hemings, Elizabeth had not been deposited in the resting-place of Kings at Westminster. Her pomp and glory were now to be limited to the display of heralds and banners and officers of state; and, to mark especially the nothingness of all this, "The lively picture of her Majesty's whole body, in her Parliament-robes, with a crown on her head, and a sceptre in her hand, lying on the corpse enshrined in lead, and balmed; covered with purple velvet; borne in a chariot, drawn by four horses, trapped in black velvet."

King James I. of England left his good city of Edinburgh on the 5th of April, 1603. He was nearly five weeks on the road, banqueting wherever he rested; at one time releasing prisoners, "out of his princely and Christian commiseration," and at another hanging a cut-purse taken in the fact. He entered the immediate neighbourhood of London in a way that certainly monarch never entered before or since:—"From Stamford Hill to London was made a train with a tame deer, that the hounds could not take it faster than his Majesty proceeded." On the 7th of May he was safely lodged at the Charter-House; and one of his first acts of authority in the metropolis, after creating four new peers, and issuing a proclamation against robbery on the Borders, was to order the Privy Seal for the patent to Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspere, and others. We learn from the patent itself that the King's servants were to perform publicly "when the infection of the plague shall decrease." It is clear that the King's servants were not at liberty then to perform publicly. How long the theatres were closed we do not exactly know; but a document is in existence, dated April 9th, 1604, directing the Lord Mayor of London, and Justices of Middlesex and Surrey, "to permit and suffer the three companies of players to the King, Queen, and Prince to exercise their plays in their several and usual houses." * On the 20th of October, 1603, Joan, the wife of the celebrated Edward Alleyn, writes to her husband from London,—"About us the sickness doth cease, and likely more and more, by God's help, to cease. All the companies be come home, and well, for aught we know." Her husband is hawking in the country, and Henslowe, his partner, is at the Court. Shakspere is in London. Some one propounded a theory that there was no real man called William Shakspere, and that the plays which passed with his name were the works of Marlowe and others. This very letter of good Mrs. Alleyn shows that William Shakspere not only lived but went about pretty much like other people, calling common things by their common names, giving advice about worldly matters in the way of ordinary folk, and spoken of by the wife of his friend without any wonder or laudation, just as if he had written no "Midsummer Night's Dream," or "Othello":—"Aboute a weeke a goe there came a youthe, who said he was Mr. Francis Chaloner, who would have borrowed x^{li} to have bought things for . . . . . and said he was known unto you, and Mr. Shakespeare of the Globe, who came . . . . said he knewe hym not, onely he herde of hym that he was a roge . . . . . so he was glade we did not lend him the monney. . . . . Richard Johnes [went] to secke and inquire after the fellow, and said he had lent hym a horse. I feare me he gulled hym, thoughe he gulled not us. The youthe was a prety youthe, and hansome in appayrell: we knowe not what became of hym." So we learn from the Papers in Dulwich College printed in Mr. Collier's "Memoirs of Edward Alleyn." But there is a portentous "discovery" brought to light by the *science* of Palæography. Mr. Halliwell, the *facile princeps* of the science, says, "It has been stated that Shakspeare was in London in October, 1603, on the strength of a letter printed in Mr. Collier's Memoirs of Alleyn, p. 63; but having carefully examined the original, I am convinced it has been misread. The following is now all that remains." And then Mr. Halliwell prints "all that remains," which does not contain the name of Shakspere at all. We know, beyond a doubt, that Mr. Collier saw the words which he for the first time published; though the letter was much damaged by the damp, and was falling to pieces. But although Shakspere was in London on the 20th of October, 1603, it is tolerably clear that the performances at the public theatres were not resumed till after the order of the 9th of April, 1604. In

* Malone's "Inquiry," p. 215. Mr. Collier prints the document in his "Life of Alleyn," by which it appears that there had been letters of prohibition previously issued that had reference to the continuance of the plague, and that it still partially continued.

the Office Books of the Treasurer of the Chamber there is an entry of a payment of thirty-two pounds upon the Council's warrant, dated at Hampton Court, February 8th, 1604, "by way of his Majesty's free gift" to Richard Burbage, one of his Majesty's comedians, "for the maintenance and relief of himself and the rest of his company, being prohibited to present any plays publicly in or near London, by reason of great peril that might grow through the extraordinary concourse and assembly of people, to a new increase of the plague, till it shall please God to settle the city in a more perfect health." * But though the public playhouses might be closed through the fear of an "extraordinary concourse and assembly of people," the King, a few months previous, had sent for his own players to a considerable distance to perform before the Court at Wilton. There is an entry in the same Office Book of a payment of thirty pounds to John Hemings "for the pains and expenses of himself and the rest of his company in coming from Mortlake in the county of Surrey unto the Court aforesaid, and there presenting before his Majesty one play on the 2nd of December last, by way of his Majesty's reward." † Wilton was the seat of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom it has been held that Shakspere's Sonnets were addressed. We do not yield our assent to this opinion.‡ But we know from good authority that this nobleman, "the most universally beloved and esteemed of any

[William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.]

man of that age," (according to Clarendon,) befriended Shakspere, and that his brother joined him in his acts of kindness. The dedication by John Heminge and Henry Condell, prefixed to the first collected edition of the works of Shakspere, is addressed, "To the most noble and incomparable pair of brethren, William Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Earl of Montgomery." In the submissive language of poor

* Cunningham's "Revels at Court," p. xxxv. † Ibid. p. xxxiv.
‡ See "Studies," page 498.

players to their "singular good lords" they say, "When we value the places your Honours sustain, we cannot but know their dignity greater than to descend to the reading of these trifles; and while we name them trifles, we have deprived ourselves of the defence of our dedication. But since your Lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something, heretofore; and have prosecuted both them, and their author living, with so much favour: we hope that (they out-living him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be executor to his own writings) you will use the like indulgence toward them you have done unto their parent." They subsequently speak of their Lordships liking the several parts of the volume when they were acted · but their author was the object of their personal regard and favour.

[Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery.]

The call to Wilton of Shakspere's company might probably have arisen from Lord Pembroke's desire to testify this favour. It would appear to be the first theatrical performance before James in England. The favour of the Herberts towards Shakspere thus began early. The testimony of the player-editors would imply that it lasted during the poet's life. The young Earl of Pembroke, upon whom James had just bestowed the Order of the Garter, would scarcely, we think, have been well pleased to have welcomed the poet to Wilton who had thus addressed him:—

"How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!"*

* Sonnet xcv.

[Wolsey's Hall, Hampton Court.]

At the Christmas of the same year the King had taken up his residence at Hampton Court. It was here, a little before the period when the Conference on Conformity in Religion was begun, that the Queen and eleven ladies of honour were presenting Daniel's Masque; and Shakspere and his fellows performed six plays before the King and Prince, receiving twenty nobles for each play.* The patronage of the new King to his servants, players acting at the Globe, seems to have been constant and liberal. To Shakspere this must have been a season of prosperity and of honour. The accession of the King gave him something better. His early friend and patron Southampton was released from a long imprisonment. Enjoying the friendship of Southampton and Pembroke, who were constantly about the King, their tastes may have led the monarch to a just preference of the works of Shakspere before those of any other dramatist. The six plays performed before the King and Prince in the Christmas of 1603-4 at Hampton Court, were followed at the succeed-

* Cunningham's "Revels at Court," p. xxxv.

ing Christmas by performances "at the Banqueting-House at Whitehall," in which the plays of Shakspere were preferred above those of every other competitor. There were eleven performances by the King's players, of which eight were plays of Shakspere. Jonson shared this honour with him in the representation of "Every One in his Humour," and "Every One out of his Humour." A single play by Heywood, another by Chapman, and a tragedy by an unknown author, completed the list of these revels at Whitehall. It is told, Malone says, "upon authority which there is no reason to doubt, that King James bestowed especial honour upon Shakspere." The story is told in the Advertisement to Lintot's edition of Shakspere's Poems—"That most learned Prince and great patron of learning, King James the First, was pleased with his own hand to write an amicable letter to Mr. Shakespeare; which letter, though now lost, remained long in the hands of Sir William Davenant, as a credible person now living can testify." Was the honour bestowed as a reward for the compliment to the King in "Macbeth," or was the compliment to the King a tribute of gratitude for the honour?

"The Accompte of the Office of the Reuelles of this whole yeres Charge, in An° 1604" which was discovered through the zealous industry of Mr. Peter Cunningham, is a most interesting document: first, as giving the names of the plays which were performed at Court, and showing how pre-eminently attractive were those of Shakspere; secondly, as exhibiting the undiminished charm of Shakspere's early plays, such as "The Comedy of Errors," and "Love's Labour 's Lost;" and, thirdly, as fixing the date of one of our poet's dramas, which has generally been assigned to a later period—"Measure for Measure." The worthy scribe who keeps the accounts has no very exact acquaintance with "the poets wch mayd the plaies," as he heads the margin of his entries; for he adds another variety to the modes of spelling the

[Banqueting-House, Whitehall.]

name of the greatest of those poets—"Shaxberd." The list gives us no information as to the actors which acted the plays, in addition to the poets which made them. We learn, indeed, from the corresponding accounts in the Office Books of the Treasurer of the Chamber, that on the 21st of January, 1605, sixty pounds were paid "To John Hemynges, one of his Ma^ts^ players, for the paines and expences of himselfe and the reste of his Companie, in playinge and presentinge of sixe Enterludes, or plaies, before his Matie." The name of Shakspere is found amongst the names of the performers of Ben Jonson's "Sejanus," which was first acted at the Globe in 1603. Burbage, Lowin, Hemings, Condell, Phillipps, Cooke, and Sly had also parts in it. In Jonson's "Volpone," brought out at the Globe in 1605, the name of Shakspere does not occur amongst the performers. It has been conjectured, therefore, that he retired from the stage between 1603 and 1605. But, appended to the letter from the Council to the Lord Mayor and other Justices, dated April the 9th, 1604 (which we have already noticed), there has been found the following list of the "King's Company:"*—

"Burbidge,	Condle,	Cowley,
Shakspeare,	Hemminges,	Hostler,
Fletcher,	Armyn,	Day."
Phillips,	Slye,	

It is thus seen that in the spring of 1604 Shakspere was still an actor, and still held the same place in the company which he held in the patent of the previous year. Lawrence Fletcher, the first named in that patent, has changed places with Burbage. The probable explanation of these changes is, that the shareholders periodically chose one of their number as their chairman, or official head; that Lawrence Fletcher filled this office at Aberdeen in 1601, and at London in 1603, Burbage succeeding to his rank and office in 1604. In the meantime the reputation of Shakspere as a dramatic poet must have secured to him something higher than the fame of an actor, and something better than courtly honours and pecuniary advantages. He must have commanded the respect and admiration of the most distinguished amongst his contemporaries for taste and genius. Few, indeed, comparatively of his plays were printed. The author of "Othello," for example, must have been content with the fame which the theatre afforded him. But in 1604, probably to vindicate his reputation from the charge of having, in his mature years, written his "Hamlet," such as it appeared in the imperfect edition of 1603, was published "The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect coppie." Edition after edition was called for; and assuredly that wonderful tragedy, whose true power can only be adequately felt by repeated study, must have carried its wonderful philosophy into the depths of the heart of many a reader who was no haunter of play-houses, and have most effectually vindicated plays and play-books from the charge of being nothing but "unprofitable pleasures of sin," to be denounced in common with "Love-locks, periwigs, women's curling, powdering and cutting of the hair, bonfires, New-year's gifts, May-games, amorous pastorals, lascivious effeminate music, excessive laughter, luxurious disorderly Christmas keeping, mummeries."† From the hour of the publication of "Hamlet," in 1604, to these our days, many a solitary student must have closed that wonderful book with the application to its author of something like the thought that Hamlet himself expresses,—"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!"

* Collier's "Memoirs of Alleyn," p. 68. † Prynne's "Histrio-Mastix."

[The Garden of New Place.]

CHAPTER III.

REST.

We have seen that in the year 1602 Shakspere was investing the gains of his profession in the purchase of property at Stratford. It appears from the original Fines of the Court of King's Bench, preserved in the Chapter-house, that a little before the accession of James, in 1603, Shakspere had also purchased a messuage at Stratford, with barns, gardens, and orchards, of Hercules Underhill, for the sum of sixty pounds.* There can be little doubt that this continued acquisition of property in his native place had reference to the ruling desire of the poet to retire to his quiet fields and the placid intercourse of society at Stratford, out of the turmoil of his professional life and the excitement of the companionship of the gay and the brilliant. And yet it appears highly probable that he was encouraged, at this very period, through the favour of those who rightly estimated his merit, to apply for an office which would have brought him even more closely in connexion with the Court. As one of

* The document was first published in Mr. Collier's "New Facts."

the King's servants he received the small annual fee of three pounds six and eightpence.

On the 30th of January, 1604, Samuel Daniel was appointed by letters patent to an office which, though not so called, was in fact that of master of the Queen's Revels. In a letter from Daniel to Lord Ellesmere, he expresses his thanks for a "new, great, and unlooked for favour. . . . . I shall now be able to live free from those cares and troubles that hitherto have been my continual and wearisome companions. . . . . I cannot but know that I am less deserving than some that sued by other of the nobility unto her Majesty for this room: if M. Drayton, my good friend, had been chosen, I should not have murmured, for sure I am he would have filled it most excellently; but it seemeth to mine humble judgment that one who is the author of plays now daily presented on the public stages of London, and the possessor of no small gains, and moreover himself an actor in the King's Company of Comedians, could not with reason pretend to be Master of the Queen's Majesty's Revels, forasmuch as he would sometimes be asked to approve and allow of his own writings. Therefore he, and more of like quality, cannot justly be disappointed, because through your honour's gracious interposition the chance was haply mine."* It appears highly probable that Shakspere was pointed at as the author of popular plays, the possessor of no small gains, the actor in the King's company. It is not impossible that Shakspere looked to this appointment as a compensation for his retirement from the profession of an actor, retaining his interest, however, as a theatrical proprietor. Be that as it may, he still carried forward his ruling purpose of the acquisition of property at Stratford. In 1605 he accomplished a purchase which required a larger outlay than any previous investment. On the 24th of July, in the third year of James, a conveyance was made by Ralph Huband, Esq., to William Shakspere, gentleman, of a moiety of a lease of the great and small tithes of Stratford, for the remainder of a term of ninety-two years, and the amount of the purchase was four hundred and forty pounds. There can be little doubt that he was the cultivator of his own land, availing himself of the assistance of his brother Gilbert, and, in an earlier period, probably of his father. An account in 1597 of the Stock of malt in the borough of Stratford, is said to exhibit ten quarters in the possession of William Shakspere, of Chapel Street Ward. New Place was situated in Chapel Street. The purchase of a moiety of the tithes of so large a parish as Stratford might require extensive arrangements for their collection. Tithes in those days were more frequently collected in kind than by a *modus*. But even if a modus was taken, it would require a knowledge of the value of agricultural produce to farm the tithes with advantage.† But before the date of this purchase it is perfectly clear that William Shakspere was in the exercise of the trading part of a farmer's business. He bought the hundred and seven acres of land of John and William Combe in May, 1602. In 1604 a declaration was entered in the Borough Court of Stratford, on a plea of debt, William Shakspere against Philip Rogers, for the sum of thirty-five shillings and ten-pence, for corn delivered. The precept was issued in the usual form upon this declaration, the delivery of the corn being stated to have taken place at several times in the first and second years of James. There cannot be more distinct evidence that William Shakspere, at the very period when his dramas were calling forth the rapturous applause of the new Sovereign and his Court, and when he himself, as it would seem, was ambitious of a courtly office, did

* This letter, found amongst the "Egerton Papers," is published by Mr. Collier in his "New Facts."

† There is a document dated the 28th of October, 1614, in which William Replingham covenants with William Shakspere to make recompense for any loss and hindrance, upon arbitration, for and in respect to the increasing value of tithes.

not disdain to pursue the humble though honourable occupation of a farmer in Stratford, and to exercise his just rights of property in connexion with that occupation. We must believe that he looked forward to the calm and healthful employment of the evening of his days, as a tiller of the land which his father had tilled before him, at the same time working out noble plans of poetical employment in his comparative leisure, as the best scheme of life in his declining years. The exact period when he commenced the complete realization of these plans is somewhat doubtful. He had probably ceased to appear as an actor before 1605.* If the date 1608 be correctly assigned to a letter held to be written by Lord Southampton, it is clear that Shakspere was not then an actor, for he is there described as "till *of late* an actor of good account in the company, *now* a sharer in the same." His partial freedom from his professional labours certainly preceded his final settlement at Stratford.

In the conveyance by the Combes to Shakspere in 1602, he is designated as William Shakspere of Stratford-upon-Avon. The same designation holds in subsequent legal documents connected with Stratford; but there is no doubt that, at the period of the conveyance from the Combes, he was an actor in the company performing at the Blackfriars and at the Globe; and in tracing therefore the "whereabout" of Shakspere, from the imperfect records which remain to us, we have assumed that where the fellows of Shakspere are to be found, there is he to be also located. But in the belief that before 1608 he had ceased to be an actor, we are not required to assume that he was so constantly with his company as before that partial retirement. His interest would no doubt require his occasional presence with them, for he continued to be a considerable proprietor in their lucrative concerns. That prudence and careful management which could alone have enabled him to realize a large property out of his professional pursuits, and at the same time not to dissipate it by his agricultural occupations, appears to have been founded upon an arrangement by which he secured the assistance of his family, and at the same time made a provision for them. We have seen that in 1602 his brother Gilbert was his representative at Stratford. Richard, who was ten years his junior, and who, dying a year before him, was buried at Stratford, would also appear to have been resident there. His youngest brother Edmund, sixteen years his junior, was, there can be little question, associated with him in the theatre; and he probably looked to him to attend to the management of his property in London, after he retired from any active attention to its conduct. But Edmund died early. He lived in the parish of St. Saviour's, and the register of burials of that parish has the following record:—"1607, December 31st, Edmond Shakespeare, a player, in the church." The death of his brother might probably have had a considerable influence upon the habits of his life, and might have induced him to dispose of all his theatrical property, as there is reason to believe he did, several years before his death. The value of a portion of this property has been ascertained, as far as it can be, upon an estimate for its sale; and by this estimate the amount of his portion, as compared with that of his co-proprietors, is distinctly shown. The original establishment of the theatre at the Blackfriars, in 1574 was in opposition, to the attempt of the Corporation of London to subject the players to harsh restrictions. Within the city the authority of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen appears to have been powerful enough to resist the protection which was given to the players by the Court. Burbage therefore built his theatre at a convenient place, just out of the jurisdiction of the city. In 1579 the Corporation were defeated in some attempt to interfere with the players at the Blackfriars Theatre, by a peremptory order in Council that they should

* See the preceding Chapter.

not be restrained nor in anywise molested in the exercise of their quality. The players at a subsequent period occasionally exercised freedoms towards the dignitaries of the city, not so much in the regular drama, as in those merriments or jigs with which the comic performers amused the groundlings. In 1605 the worshipful magistrates took this freedom so greatly to heart that they brought the matter before the Privy Council:—"Whereas Kemp, Armin, and others, players at the Blackfriars, have again not forborne to bring upon their stage one or more of the worshipful Aldermen of the City of London, to their great scandal and to the lessening of their authority; the Lords of the right honourable the Privy Council are besought to call the said players before them and to inquire into the same, that order may be taken to remedy the abuse, either by putting down or removing the said theatre."* It was probably with reference to such satirizers, often extemporal, whose licentiousness dates back as far as the days of Tarleton, that Hamlet said, "After your death you had better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you lived." Nothing was done by the Privy Council in consequence of the complaint of 1605; but it appears that in 1608 the question of the jurisdiction of the City in the Blackfriars, and especially with reference to the playhouse, was again brought before Lord Ellesmere. The proprietors of the theatre remained in undisturbed possession. Out of this attempt a negotiation appears to have arisen for the purchase of the property by the City; for amongst the documents connected with this attempt of the Corporation is found a paper headed, "For avoiding of the playhouse in the precinct of the Blackfriars." The document states, in conclusion, that "in the whole it will cost the Lord Mayor and the citizens at the least 7000*l.*" Richard Burbage claims 1000*l.* for the fee, and for his four shares 933*l.* 6*s.* 8d. Laz. Fletcher owns three shares, which he rates at 700*l.*, that is, at seven years' purchase. "W. Shakespeare asketh for the wardrobe and properties of the same playhouse 500^{li}, and for his four shares, the same as his fellowes Burbidge and Fletcher, viz. 933^{li} 6^{s} 8^{d}." Hemings and Condell have each two shares, Taylor and Lowin each a share and a half; four more players each a half share; which they all value at the same rate. The hired men of the company also claim recompense for their loss; "and the widows and orphans of players who are paid by the sharers at divers rates and proportions."† It thus appears that, next to Richard Burbage, Shakspere was the largest proprietor in the theatre; that Burbage was the exclusive owner of the real property, and Shakspere of the personal. We see that Fletcher is the next largest shareholder. Fletcher's position, both in Aberdeen and in the licence of 1603, did not depend, we conclude, upon the amount of his proprietary interest. In the same way that we find in the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber payments to Hemings, when he was a holder of a smaller number of shares than Burbage, or Shakspere, or Fletcher (he probably being then paid as the man of business representing the company), so Fletcher in 1601 and 1603 stood at their head by some choice independent of his proprietorship. There is a precision in Fletcher's valuation of his shares which shows that he possessed the qualities necessary for representing the pecuniary interests of his fellows:—"Three shares which he rateth at 700*l.*, that is at seven years' purchase for each share, or thirty-three pounds six shillings and eight-pence one year with another." Shakspere founds the valuation of his share upon the valuation of Burbage and Fletcher. If the valuation be correct, Shakspere's annual income derived from his shares in the Blackfriars alone, was 133*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* His wardrobe and properties, being perishable matters, were probably valued at five years' purchase, giving him an additional income of 100*l.* This income

* Collier's "New Facts."

† This valuable document was discovered by Mr. Collier, and published by him in his "New Facts."

was derived from the Blackfriars alone. His property in the Globe Theatre was in all likelihood quite equal. He would, besides, derive additional advantages as the author of new plays. With a professional income, then, of 400*l.* or 500*l.* per annum, which may be held to be equal to six times the amount in our present money, it is evident that Shakspere possessed the means not only of a liberal expenditure at his houses in London and at Stratford, but from the same source was enabled to realize considerable sums, which he invested in real property in his native place. We can trace his purchase of his "capital messuage" in 1597; of his hundred and seven acres of land and of a tenement of 1602; of another tenement in 1603; and of a moiety of the tithes of Stratford in 1605. He had previously invested capital in the building of the Globe and the repairs of the Blackfriars. His unprofessional purchases, during a period of ten years, establish the fact that he improved his worldly advantages with that rare good sense which formed so striking a feature in the whole character of his mind. That he acquired nothing by unfair dealings with his fellow-labourers, authors or actors, we may well believe, even without the testimony of Henry Chettle in the early period of his career, that "divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing," and of Hemings and Condell after his death, who speak in their Dedication with deep reverence of "so worthy a friend and fellow." It would seem, however, that his prosperity was envied. Mr. Collier supposes that a passage in an anonymous tract called "Ratsey's Ghost," applies to Shakspere: "When thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, growing weary of playing, thy money may there bring thee to high dignity and reputation. . . . . for, I have heard indeed of some that have gone to London very meanly, and have come in time to be exceedingly wealthy." If the application be correct, we still cannot hold with Mr. Collier that the "gone to London very meanly" of this writer implies that "Shakespeare came to London a penniless fugitive."* Mr. Collier has shown that in 1589 Shakspere was a shareholder in the Blackfriars, taking precedence of the most popular actors, Kemp and Armin, and also of William Johnson, a shareholder of fifteen years' standing. If Shakspere won this position out of the depths of that poverty which it is the fashion to surround him with, absolutely without a tittle of evidence, the success of the first four or five years of his professional career must have been greater than that of any subsequent period. All the records of Shakspere's professional life, and the results of his success as exhibited in the accession of property, indicate, on the contrary, a steady and regular advance. They show us that perseverance and industry were as much the characteristics of the man as the greatness of his genius; that he held with constancy to the course of life which he had early adopted; that year by year it afforded him increased competence and wealth; and that if he had the rare privilege of pursuing an occupation which called forth the highest exercise of his powers, rendering it in every essential a pleasurable occupation, he despised not the means by which he had risen; he lived in a free and genial intercourse with his professional brethren, and to the last they were his friends and fellows.

Aubrey says of Shakspere, "He was wont to go to his native country once a-year." This statement, which there is no reason to disbelieve, has reference to the period when Shakspere was engaged as an actor. There is another account of Shakspere's mode of life, which does not contradict Aubrey, but brings down his information to a later period. In the "Diary of the Rev. John Ward, Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon," the manuscript of which was discovered in the library of the Medical Society of London, we find the following curious record of Shakspere's later years:—"I have heard that Mr. Shakspeare was a natural wit, without any art at all; hee frequented

* "New Facts," p. 31.

the plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for itt had an allowance so large, that hee spent att the rate of 1000*l.* a-year, as I have heard." The Diary of John Ward extends from 1648 to 1679; and it is in many respects interesting, from the circumstance that he united the practice of medicine to the performance of his duties as a parish priest. Amidst the scanty rural population such a combination was not unusual, the bishop of the diocese granting a licence to an incumbent to practise medicine in the diocese where he dwelt. Upon the removal from the vicarage of Stratford-upon-Avon of Alexander Beane, who had held the living from 1648 to the Restoration, John Ward, A.M., was appointed his successor in 1662.* It is evident that, although forty-six years had elapsed since the death of Shakspere, his memory was the leading association with Stratford-upon-Avon. After noticing that Shakspere had two daughters, we find the entry presented above. It is just possible that the new vicar of Stratford might have seen Shakspere's younger daughter Judith, who was born in 1585, and, having married Thomas Quiney, in 1616, lived to the age of seventy-seven, having been buried on the 9th of February, 1662. The descendants of Shakspere's family and of his friends surrounded the worthy vicar on every side; and he appears to have thought it absolutely necessary to acquire such a knowledge of the productions of the great poet as might qualify him to speak of them in general society:—"Remember to peruse Shakespeare's plays, and bee much versed in them, that I may not bee ignorant in that matter." The honest vicar was not quite certain whether the fame of Shakspere was only a provincial one, for he adds—"Whether Dr. Heylin does well, in reckoning up the dramatick poets which have been famous in England, to omit Shakespeare?"† The good man is not altogether to be blamed for having previously to 1662 been "ignorant" of Shakspere's plays. He was only thirty-three years of age; and his youth had been passed in the stormy period when the Puritans had well nigh banished all literature, and especially dramatic literature, from the minds of the people, in their intolerant proscription of all pleasure and recreation. At any rate we may accept the statements of the good vicar as founded upon the recollections of those with whom he was associated in 1662. It is wholly consistent with what we otherwise know of Shakspere's life, that "He frequented the plays all his younger time." It is equally consistent that he "in his elder days lived at Stratford." There is nothing improbable in the belief that he "supplied the stage with two plays every year." The last clause of the sentence is somewhat startling:—"And for it had an allowance so large, that he spent at the rate of 1000*l.* a-year, as I have heard." And yet the assertion must not be considered wholly an exaggeration. "He spent at the rate of 1000*l.* a-year," must mean the rate of the time when Mr. Ward is writing. During the half century which had preceded the Restoration there had been a more important decrease in the value of money than had even taken place in the reign of Elizabeth. During that reign the prices of all commodities were constantly rising; but after the reduction of the legal rate of interest from ten per cent. to eight in 1624, and from eight to six in 1651, the change was still more remarkable. Sir Josias Child, in 1688, says that five hundred pounds with a daughter, sixty years before, was esteemed a larger portion than two thousand pounds now. It would appear, therefore, that the thousand a-year in 1662 was not more than one-third of the amount in 1612; and this sum, from 300*l.* to 400*l.*, was, as near as may be, the amount which Shakspere appears to have derived from his theatrical property. In all probability he held that property during the greater part of the period when he

* See the list of Incumbents in Wheler's "History of Stratford-upon-Avon," p. 32.

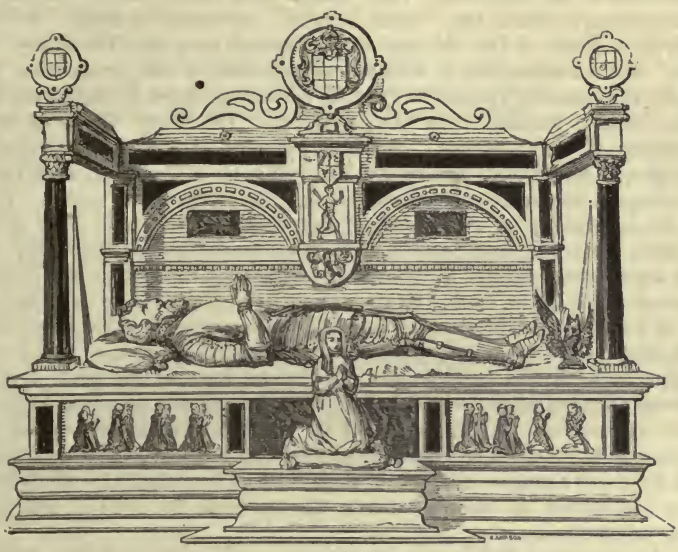
† See "Diary," &c., 1839, p. 183.

"supplied the stage with two plays every year;" and this indirect remuneration for his poetical labours might readily have been mistaken, fifty years afterwards, as "an allowance so large" for authorship that the good vicar records it as a memorable thing.

It is established that "Othello" was performed in 1602; "Hamlet," greatly enlarged, was published in 1604; "Measure for Measure" was acted before the Court on St. Stephen's night in the same year. If we place Shakspere's partial retirement from his professional duties about this period, and regard the plays whose dates up to this point have not been fixed by any authentic record, or satisfactory combination of circumstances, we have abundant work in reserve for the great poet in the maturity of his intellect. "Lear," "Macbeth," "Timon of Athens," "Troilus and Cressida," "Cymbeline," "The Winter's Tale," "The Tempest," "Henry VIII.," "Coriolanus," "Julius Cæsar," "Antony and Cleopatra," eleven of the noblest productions of the human intellect, so varied in their character,—the deepest passion, the profoundest philosophy, the wildest romance, the most comprehensive history—what a glorious labour to fill the nine or ten remaining years of the life of the man who had left his native fields twenty years before to seek for advancement in doubtful and perilous paths,—in a profession which was denounced by some and despised by others,—amongst companions full of genius and learning, but who had perished early in their pride and their self-abandonment! And he returns wealthy and honoured to the bosom of those who are dearest to him—his wife and daughters, his mother, his sisters and brothers. The companions of his boyhood are all around him. They have been useful members of society in their native place. He has constantly kept up his intercourse with them. They have looked to him for assistance in their difficulties. He is come to be one of them, to dwell wholly amongst them, to take a deeper interest in their pleasures and in their cares, to receive their sympathy. He is come to walk amidst his own fields, to till them, to sell their produce. His labour will be his recreation. In the activity of his body will the energy of his intellect find its support and its rest. His nature is eminently fitted for action as well as contemplation. Were it otherwise, he would have "bad dreams," like his own "Hamlet." Morbid thoughts may have come over him "like a passing cloud;" but from this time his mind will be eminently healthful. The imagination and the reason henceforth will be wonderfully balanced. Much of this belongs to the progressive character of his understanding; something to his favourable position.

To a mind which habitually dwells amongst high thoughts,—familiar with the greatness of the past, the littleness of the present, and the vastness of the future,—the petty jealousies, the envies, the heart-burnings, that have ever belonged to provincial society can only present themselves under the aspect of the ludicrous. William Shakspere was no doubt pointed out by some of his neighbours as the rich player that had "gone to London very meanly." It appears to us that we can trace the workings of this jealousy in a small matter which has hitherto been viewed somewhat differently. The father and mother of Shakspere were of good family,—a circumstance more regarded in those days than wealth. We never have attempted to show that John Shakspere was a wealthy man; but we have contended that the evidence by which it has been sought to prove that he was "steeped up to the very lips in poverty" did not support the allegation. On the grant of arms to John Shakspere made in 1596, which is preserved in the Heralds' College, there is a memorandum which appears to have been made as an explanation of the circumstances connected with the grant. It recites that John Shakspere showed a previous patent; that he had been chief officer of Stratford; "that he hath lands and tenements, of good wealth and substance, five hundred pounds; that he married a daughter

and heir of Arden, a gentleman of worship." Malone, who published this document, holds that the assertion that he was worth five hundred pounds is incompatible with the averment of a bill in Chancery, filed by John Shakspere and Mary his wife, against John Lamberte, who had foreclosed upon the estate of Asbies, mortgaged to his father in 1578. The concluding petition of this bill in Chancery says:—"And for that also the said John Lamberte is of great wealth and ability, and well friended and allied amongst gentlemen and freeholders of the country in the said county of Warwick, where he dwelleth, and your said orators are of small wealth and very few friends and alliance in the said county." Malone calls this "the confession of our poet's father himself" of his poverty, and even of his insolvency. Others hold the same opinion. The averments of the petition and the replication afford a proof to the contrary; for these documents state that the mortgagee wrongfully held possession of the premises, although the mortgage-money was tendered in 1580. The complainant says that he is a man of small wealth,—the man against whom he complains is one of great wealth. The possessor of five hundred pounds was not, even in those days, a man of great wealth; but it was a reason, according to the heralds, for such a grant of arms as belonged to a gentleman. But he had "very few friends and alliance in the said county." This was a motive probably for some one of higher wealth and greater friends making an attempt to disturb the honours which the heralds had confirmed to John Shakspere. It appears that some charges were made against Garter and Clarencieux, Kings at Arms (which offices were then held by Dethick and Camden), that they had wrongfully given arms to certain persons, twenty-three in number. The answer of Garter and Clarencieux, preserved in the Herald's College, was presented on the 10th of May, 1602; and it appears that John Shakspere was one of those named in the "libellous scroll," as the heralds call it. Their answer as regards Shakspere is as follows: "*Shakespere.*—It may as well be said that Harely, who beareth gould a bend between two cotizes sables, and all other that [bear] or and argent a bend sables, usurpe the coat of the Lo. Mauley. As for the speare in bend, [it] is a patible difference; and the person to whom it was granted hath borne magestracy, and was justice of peace at Stratford-upon-Avon. He maried the daughter and heire of Arderne, and was able to maintain that estate." The information, or "libellous scroll," was heard before Lord Howard and others on the 1st of May, 1602. At that time John Shakspere had been dead six months. The answer of the heralds points to the position of the person to whom the arms were granted in 1599, when the shield of Shakspere was impaled with the ancient arms of Arden of Wellingcote. In May, 1602, William Shakspere bore these joint arms of his father and mother by virtue of the grant of 1599; and against him, therefore, was the "libellous scroll" directed. He had bought a "place of lordship" in the county of Warwick; he was written down in all indentures, gentleman and *generosus;* he had a new coat of arms, it is true, but he claimed it through a gentle ancestry. Was there any one in his immediate neighbourhood, a rich and proud man, who looked upon the acquisition of lands and houses by the poor player with a self-important jealousy? Sir Thomas Lucy—he who possessed Charlcote in the days of William Shakspere's youth—was dead. He died on the 6th of July, 1600; and it is probable that he who had looked with reverence upon the worthy knight when, as a boy, he was unfamiliar with greatness, might have dropped a tear upon his grave in the parish church of Charlcote. But another Sir Thomas Lucy, who had just succeeded to large possessions, might have thought it necessary to make an attempt to lower, in the eyes of his neighbours, the importance of the presumptuous man who, being nothing but an actor and a poet, had presumed to write himself gentleman. In the first copy of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" there is not a word about the dignities of Justice Shallow, his old coat, or his quarters.



[Monument of Sir Thomas Lucy.]

Those passages first appeared in the folio of 1623. They probably existed when the play was acted before James in November, 1604 :—

"*Shallow.* Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star-chamber matter of it: if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire.

Slender. In the county of Gloster, justice of peace, and *coram.*

Shal. Ay, cousin Slender, and *cust-alorum.*

Slen. Ay, and *ratolorum* too; and a gentleman born, master parson; who writes himself *armigero;* in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, armigero.

Shal. Ay, that I do; and have done any time these three hundred years.

Slen. All his successors, gone before him, have done 't; and all his ancestors, that come after him, may: they may give the dozen white luces in their coat.

Shal. It is an old coat.

Evans. The dozen white louses do become an old coat well; it agrees well, passant: it is a familiar beast to man, and signifies love.

Shal. The luce is the fresh fish; the salt fish is an old coat."

The allusion of the dozen white luces cannot be mistaken. "Three luces hauriant, argent," are the arms of the Lucys. The luce is a pike—"the fresh fish,"—but the pike of the Lucys, as shown in their arms in the church window of Charlcote,* are *hauriant,* springing,—the heraldic term applied to fish; *saltant* being the term applied to quadrupeds in the same attitude. This is the *salt* or saltant fish of Shallow. The whole passage is a playful satire upon the solemn pretensions of one with three hundred years of ancestry boasting of his "old coat." The "dozen white louses" (the vulgarism covered by the Welshman's pronunciation) points the application of the satire with a personality which, coming from one whose habitual practice was never to ridicule classes or individuals, shows that it was a smart return for some insult or injury. The old coat, we believe, could not endure the

* See Dugdale's "Warwickshire," p. 401.

neighbourhood of the new coat. The "dozen white luces" could not leap in the same atmosphere in which the "spear in bend" presumed to dwell. We can understand the ridicule of the old coat in the second copy of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," without connecting it with the absurd story of the prosecution for deer-stealing by the elder Sir Thomas Lucy. The ballad attributed to Shakspere is clearly a modern forgery, founded upon the passage in "The Merry Wives of Windsor." If the ridicule of the "old coat" had been intended to mark Shakspere's sense of early injuries, it would have appeared in the first copy of that play, when the feeling which prompted the satire was strong, because the offence was recent. It finds a place in the enlarged copy of that comedy, produced, there can be little doubt, at a period when some one had prompted an attack upon the validity of the armorial honours which were granted to his father; attacking himself, in all likelihood, in the insolent spirit of an aristocratic provinciality. The revenge is enduring; the subject of the revenge is forgotten. The antiquarian microscope has discovered that, in 1602, Sir Thomas Lucy (not the same who punished Shakspere "for stealing his deer," because *he* died in 1600*) sent Sir Thomas Egerton the present of a buck, on the very occasion when the "Othello" of Shakspere was presented before Queen Elizabeth at Harefield. Whatever might be the comparative honours of William Shakspere and the Knight of Charlcote at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this fact furnishes a precise estimate of their relative importance for all future times. Posterity has settled the debate between the new coat and the old coat by a very summary arbitrement.

With the exception of this piece of ridicule in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," we know not of a single personality which can be alleged against Shakspere, in an age when his dramatic contemporaries, especially, bespattered their rivals and their enemies as fiercely as any modern paragraph writer. But vulgar opinion, which is too apt most easily to recognise the power of talent in its ability to inflict pain—which would scarcely appreciate the sentiment,

> "O, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant"—

has assigned to Shakspere a performance which has the quality, extraordinary as regards himself, of possessing scurrility without wit. It is something lower in the moral scale even than the fabricated ballad upon Sir Thomas Lucy; for it exhibits a wanton and unprovoked outrage upon an unoffending neighbour, in the hour of convivial intercourse. Rowe tells the story as if he thought he were doing honour to the genius of the man whose good qualities he is at the same moment recording: "The latter part of his life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be—in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and, in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford. His pleasurable wit and good nature engaged him in the acquaintance, and entitled him to the friendship, of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. Amongst them, it is a story still remembered in that country that he had a particular intimacy with Mr. Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury: it happened, that in a pleasant conversation amongst their common friends, Mr. Combe told Shakspeare, in a laughing manner, that he fancied he intended to write his epitaph, if he happened to outlive him, and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was

* See "Egerton Papers," published by the Camden Society, p. 350, in which this fact is overlooked.

dead, he desired it might be done immediately, upon which Shakspeare gave him these four lines:—

> 'Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd;
> 'T is a hundred to ten his soul is not sav'd:
> If any man ask, Who lies in this tomb?
> Oh! Oh quoth the devil, 't is my John-a-Combe.'

But the sharpness of the satire is said to have stung the man so severely, that he never forgave it." Certainly this is an extraordinary illustration of Shakspere's "pleasurable wit and good nature"—of those qualities which won for him the name of the "gentle Shakspere;" which made Jonson, stern enough to most men, proclaim—"He was honest, and of an open and free nature," and that his "mind and manners" were reflected in his "well-turned and true-filed lines." John-a-Combe never forgave the sharpness of the satire! And yet he bequeathed by his last will "To Mr. William Shakspere, five pounds." Aubrey tells the story with a difference:—"One time, as he was at the tavern at Stratford-upon-Avon, one Combes, an old rich usurer, was to be buryed, he makes there this extemporary epitaph;" and then he gives the lines with a variation, in which "vows" rhymes to "allows," instead of "sav'd" to "ingrav'd."

Of course, following out this second story, the family of John Combe resented the insult to the memory of their parent, who died in 1614; and yet an intimacy subsisted between them even till the death of Shakspere, for in his own will he bequeaths to the son of the usurer a remarkable token of personal regard, the badge of a gentleman:—"To Mr. Thomas Combe my sword." The whole story is a fabrication. Ten in the hundred was the old name of opprobrium for one who lent money. To receive interest at all was called usury. "That ten in the hundred was gone to the devil," was an old joke, that shaped itself into epigrams long before the death of John Combe; and in the "Remains of Richard Brathwaite," printed in 1618, we have the very epitaph assigned to Shakspere, with a third set of variations, given as

[The College.]

[Ancient Hall in the College.]

a notable production of this voluminous writer: "Upon one John Combe, of Stratford-upon-Avon, a notable usurer, fastened upon a Tombe that he had caused to be built in his Lifetime." The lie direct is given by the will of John Combe to this third version of the lines against him; for it directs that a convenient tomb shall be erected one year after his decease. John Combe was the neighbour and without doubt the friend of Shakspere. His house was within a short distance of New Place, being upon the site of the ancient College, and constructed in part out of the offices of that monastic establishment.* It was of John Combe and his brother that Shakspere made a large purchase of land in 1602. The better tradition survived the memory of Rowe's and Aubrey's epitaph; and before the mansion was pulled down, the people of Stratford delighted to look upon the Hall where John Combe had listened to the "very ready and pleasant smooth wit"† of his friend "the immortal Shakspere," as the good folks of Stratford always term their poet. It was here that the neighbours would talk of "pippins" of their "own graffing,"—of a fine "dish of leathercoats,"—"how a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair?"—"how a score of ewes now?" The poet had brought with him from London a few of the

* This fine old building, we regret to say, was taken down in 1799. † Aubrey.

new mulberry plants. There was one at New Place, and one at the College. Which throve best? Should they ever raise silk-worms upon the leaves, and give a new manufacture to Stratford? The King was sanguine about the success of his mulberry-tree project, for he procured plants from France, and dispersed them through the kingdom; but they doubted.* The poet planted his mulberry-tree for the ornament of his "curious knotted garden;" little dreaming that his very fame in future times should accelerate its fall.

It would be something if we could now form an exact notion of the house in which Shakspere lived; of its external appearance, its domestic arrangements. Dugdale, speaking of Sir Hugh Clopton, who built the bridge at Stratford and repaired the chapel, says:—"On the north side of this chapel was a fair house, built of brick and timber, by the said Hugh, wherein he lived in his later days, and died." This was nearly a century before Shakspere bought the "fair house," which, in the will of Sir Hugh Clopton, is called the "great house." Theobald says that Shakspere, "having repaired and modelled it to his own mind, changed the name to New Place." Malone holds that this is an error:—"I find from ancient documents that it was called New Place as early at least as 1565." The great house, having been sold out of the Clopton family, was purchased by Shakspere of William Underhill, Esq. Shakspere by his will left it to his daughter, Mrs. Hall, with remainder to her heirs male, or, in default, to her daughter Elizabeth and her heirs male, or the heirs male of his daughter Judith. Mrs. Hall died in 1649; surviving her husband fourteen years. There is little doubt that she occupied the house when Queen Henrietta Maria, in 1643, coming to Stratford in royal state with a large army, resided for three weeks under this roof. The property descended to her daughter Elizabeth, first married to Mr. Thomas Nash, and afterwards to Sir Thomas Barnard. She dying without issue, New Place was sold in 1675, and was ultimately re-purchased by the Clopton family. Sir Hugh Clopton, in the middle of the eighteenth century, resided there. The learned knight thoroughly repaired and beautified the place, as the local historians say, and built a modern front to it. This was the first stage of its desecration. After the death of Sir Hugh, in 1751, it was sold to the Rev. Francis Gastrell, in 1753.

The total destruction of New Place in 1757, by its then possessor, is difficult to account for upon any ordinary principles of action. Malone thus relates the story: "The Rev. Mr. Gastrell, a man of large fortune, resided in it but a few years, in consequence of a disagreement with the inhabitants of Stratford. Every house in that town that is let or valued at more than 40*s.* a-year is assessed by the overseers, according to its worth and the ability of the occupier, to pay a monthly rate toward the maintenance of the poor. As Mr. Gastrell resided part of the year at Lichfield, he thought he was assessed too highly; but being very properly compelled by the magistrates of Stratford to pay the whole of what was levied on him, on the principle that his house was occupied by his servants in his absence, he peevishly declared, that *that* house should never be assessed again: and soon afterwards pulled it down, sold the materials, and left the town. Wishing, as it should seem, to be 'damn'd to everlasting fame,' he had some time before cut down Shakspere's celebrated mulberry-tree, to save himself the trouble of showing it to those whose admiration of our great poet led them to visit the poetic ground on which it stood." The cutting down of the mulberry-tree seems to have been regarded as the chief offence in Mr. Gastrell's own generation. His wife was a sister of Johnson's correspondent, Mrs. Aston. After the death of Mr. Gastrell, his widow resided at Lichfield; and in 1776, Boswell, in company with Johnson, dined with the sisters.

* See Howes's Continuation of Stow's "Chronicle," p. 894.

Boswell on this occasion says,—"I was not informed till afterwards, that Mrs. Gastrell's husband was the clergyman who, while he lived at Stratford-upon-Avon, with Gothic barbarity cut down Shakspere's mulberry-tree, and, as Dr. Johnson told me, did it to vex his neighbours. His lady, I have reason to believe on the same authority, participated in the guilt of what the enthusiasts of our immortal bard deem almost a species of sacrilege." The mulberry-tree was cut down in 1756; was sold for firewood; and the bulk of it was purchased by a Mr. Thomas Sharpe, of Stratford-upon-Avon, clock and watchmaker, who made a solemn affidavit some years afterwards, that out of a sincere veneration for the memory of its celebrated planter he had the greater part of it conveyed to his own premises, and worked it into curious toys and useful articles. The destruction of the mulberry-tree, which the previous possessor of New Place used to show with pride and veneration, enraged the people of Stratford; and Mr. Wheler tells us that he remembers to have heard his father say that, when a boy, he assisted in the revenge of breaking the reverend destroyer's windows. The hostilities were put an end to by the Rev. Mr. Gastrell quitting Stratford in 1757; and, upon the principle of doing what he liked with his own, pulling the house to the ground in which Shakspere and his children had lived and died.

There is no good end to be served in execrating the memory of the man who deprived the world of the pleasure of looking upon the rooms in which the author of some of the greatest productions of human intellect had lived, in the common round of humanity—of treading reverentially upon the spot hallowed by his presence and by his labours. It appears to us that this person intended no insult to the memory of Shakspere; and, indeed, thought nothing of Shakspere in the whole course of his proceedings. He bought a house, and paid for it. He wished to enjoy it in quiet. People with whom he could not sympathize intruded upon him to see the gardens and the house. In the gardens was a noble mulberry-tree. Tradition said it was planted by Shakspere; and the professional enthusiasts of Shakspere, the Garricks and the Macklins, had sat under its shade, during the occupation of one who felt that there was a real honour in the ownership of such a place. The Rev. Mr. Gastrell wanted the house and the gardens to himself. He had that strong notion of the exclusive rights of property which belongs to most Englishmen, and especially to ignorant Englishmen. Mr. Gastrell was an ignorant man, though a clergyman. We have seen his diary, written upon a visit to Scotland three years after the pulling down of New Place. His journey was connected with some electioneering intrigues in the Scotch boroughs. He is a stranger in Scotland, and he goes into some of its most romantic districts. The scenery makes no impression upon him, as may be imagined; but he is scandalized beyond measure when he meets with a bad dinner and a rough lodging. He has just literature enough to know the name of Shakspere; but in passing through Forres and Glamis he has not the slightest association with Shakspere's "Macbeth." A Captain Gordon informs his vacant mind upon some abstruse subjects, as to which we have the following record:—"He assures me that the Duncan murdered at Forres was the same person that Shakspere writes of." There scarcely requires any further evidence of the prosaic character of his mind; and if there be some truth in the axiom of Shakspere, that

> "The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,"

we hold, upon the same principle, that the man who speaks in this literal way of the "person that Shakspere writes of," was a fit man to root up Shakspere's mulberry-

tree, and pull down his house, being totally insensible to the feeling that he was doing any injury to any person but himself, and holding that the wood and the stone were his own, to be dealt with at his own good pleasure.

It is a singular fact that no drawings or prints exist of New Place as Shakspere left it, or at any period before the alterations by Sir Hugh Clopton. It is a more singular fact that although Garrick had been there only fourteen years before the destruction, visiting the place with a feeling of veneration that might have led him and others to preserve some memorial of it, there is no trace whatever existing of what New Place was before 1757. The representation of "New Place" given in some variorum editions of Shakspere, is unquestionably a forgery. A modern house is now built upon the spot. Part of the site is still a pleasant place of garden and bowling-green.

The register of marriages at Stratford-upon-Avon, for the year 1607, contains the following entry:—

"John Hall, gentleman, and Susanna Shaxspere."

Susanna, the eldest daughter of William Shakspere, was now twenty-four years of age. John Hall, gentleman, a physician settled at Stratford, was in his thirty-second year. This appears in every respect to have been a propitious alliance. Shakspere received into his family a man of learning and talent. Dr. Hall lived at a period when medicine was throwing off the empirical rules by which it had been too long directed; and a school of zealous practitioners were beginning to rise up who founded their success upon careful observation. It was the age which produced the great discoveries of Harvey. Shakspere's son-in-law belonged to this school of patient and accurate observers. He kept a record of the cases which came under his care; and his notes, commencing in the year 1617, still exist in manuscript. The minutes of his earlier practice are probably lost. The more remarkable of the cases were published more than twenty years after his death, being translated from the original Latin by James Cooke, and given to the world under the title of "Select Observations on English Bodies, or Cures in desperate Diseases." This work went through three editions.

[Signature of Dr. Hall.]

The season at which the marriage of Shakspere's elder daughter took place would appear to give some corroboration to the belief that, at this period, he had wholly ceased to be an actor. It is not likely that an event to him so deeply interesting would have taken place during his absence from Stratford. It was the season of performances at the Globe; when the eager multitude who crowded the pit might look up through the open roof upon a brilliant sky; and when the poet, whose productions were the chief attraction of that stage, might rejoice that he could wander in the free woods, and the fresh fields, from the spring time,

"When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,"

to the last days of autumn, when he saw

> "The summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
> Born on the bier with white and bristly beard."

A pleasanter residence than Stratford, independent of all the early associations which endeared it to the heart of Shakspere, would have been difficult to find as a poet's resting-place. It was a town, as most old English towns were, of houses amidst gardens. Built of timber, it had been repeatedly devastated by fires. In 1594 and 1595 a vast number of houses had been thus destroyed; but they were probably small tenements and hovels. New houses arose of a better order; and one still exists, bearing the date on its front of 1596, which indicates something of the picturesque beauty of an old country town before the days arrived which, by one accord, were to be called elegant and refined—their elegance and refinement chiefly consisting in sweeping away our national architecture, and our national poetry, to substitute buildings and books which, to vindicate their own exclusive pretensions to utility, rejected every grace that invention could bestow, and in labouring for a

[House in the High Street, Stratford.]

dull uniformity lost even the character of proportion. Shakspere's own house was no doubt one of those quaint buildings which were pulled down in the last generation, to set up four walls of plain brick, with equi-distant holes called doors and windows. His garden was a spacious one. The Avon washed its banks: and within its enclosures it had its sunny terraces and green lawns, its pleached alleys and honeysuckle bowers. If the poet walked forth, a few steps brought him into the country. Near the pretty hamlet of Shottery lay his own grounds of Bishopton, then part of the great common field of Stratford. Not far from the ancient chapel of Bishopton, of which Dugdale has preserved a representation, and the walls of which still

[Bishopton Chapel.]

remain, would he watch the operation of seed-time and harvest. If he passed the church and the mill, he was in the pleasant meadows that skirted the Avon on the pathway to Ludington. If he desired to cross the river, he might now do so without going round by the great bridge; for in 1599, soon after he bought New Place, the pretty foot-bridge was erected which still bears that date. His walks and his farm-labours were his recreations. But they were not his only pleasures. It is at this period that we can fix the date of "Lear." That wonderful tragedy was first published in 1608; and the title-page recites that "It was plaid before the King's Majesty at White-Hall, uppon S. Stephen's Night; in Christmas Hollidaies." This most extraordinary production might well have been the first fruits of a period of comparative leisure; when the creative faculty was wholly untrammelled by petty cares, and the judgment might be employed in working again and again upon the first conceptions, so as to produce such a masterpiece of consummate art without after labour. The next season of repose gave birth to an effort of genius wholly different in character; but almost as wonderful in its profound sagacity and knowledge of the world, as "Lear" is unequalled for its depth of individual passion. "Troilus and Cressida" was published in 1609. Both these publications were probably made without the consent of the author; but it would seem that these plays were first produced before

[Foot-bridge above the Mill.]

the Court, and there might have been circumstances which would have rendered it difficult or impossible to prevent their publication, in the same way that the publication was prevented of any other plays after 1603, and during the author's life-time. We may well believe that the Sonnets were published in 1609, without the consent of their author. That the appearance of those remarkable lyrics should have annoyed him, by exposing, as they now appear in the eyes of some to do, the frailties of his nature, we do not for a moment believe. They would be received by his family and by the world as essentially fictitious; and ranked with the productions of the same class with which the age abounded.

The year 1608 brought its domestic joys and calamities to Shakspere. In the same font where he had been baptized, forty-three years before, was baptized, on the 21st of February, his grand-daughter, "Elizabeth, daughter of John Hall." In the same grave where his father was laid in 1601, was buried his mother, "Mary Shakspere, widow," on the 9th of September, 1608. She was the youngest daughter of Robert Arden, who died in 1556. She was probably, therefore, about seventy years of age when her sons followed her to the "house of all living." Whatever had been the fortunes of her early married life, her last years must have been eminently happy. Her eldest son, by the efforts of those talents which in their development might have filled her with apprehension, had won his way to fame and fortune. Though she had parted with him for a season, he was constant in his visits to the home of his childhood. His children were brought up under her care; his wife, in all likelihood, dwelt in affection with her under the same roof. And now he was come to be seldom absent from her; to let her gaze as frequently as she might upon the face of the loved one whom all honoured and esteemed; whose fame she was told was greater than that of any other living man. And this was the child of her earliest cares, and of her humble hopes. He had won for himself a distinction, and a

worldly recompense, far above even a mother's expectations. But in his deep affection and reverence he was unchangeably her son. In all love and honour did William Shakspere, in the autumn of 1608, lay the head of his venerable mother beneath the roof of the chancel of his beautiful parish church.*

* Shakspere was at Stratford later in the autumn of 1608. In his will he makes a bequest to his godson, William Walker. The child to whom he was sponsor was baptized at Stratford, October 16, 1608.

[Stratford Church.]

[The Bear Garden.]

CHAPTER IV.

VISITS TO LONDON.

THERE is a memorandum existing (to which we shall hereafter more particularly advert), by Thomas Greene, a contemporary of Shakspere, residing at Stratford, which, under the date of November 17th, 1614, has this record:—"My cousin Shakspeare coming yesterday to town, I went to see him how he did." We cite this memorandum here, as an indication of Shakspere's habit of occasionally visiting London; for Thomas Greene was then in the capital, with the intent of opposing the project of an inclosure at Stratford. The frequency of Shakspere's visits to London would essentially depend upon the nature of his connexion with the theatres. He was a permanent shareholder, as we have seen, at the Blackfriars; and no doubt at the Globe also. His interests as a sharer might be diligently watched over by his fellows; and he might only have visited London when he had a new play to bring forward, the fruit of his leisure in the country. But until he disposed of his ward-

robe and other properties, more frequent demands might be made upon his personal attendance than if he were totally free from the responsibilities belonging to the charge of such an embarrassing stock in trade. Mr. Collier has printed a memorandum in the handwriting of Edward Alleyn, dated April 1612, of the payment of various sums "for the Blackfryers," amounting to 599*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* Mr. Collier adds, "To whom the money was paid is nowhere stated; but, for aught we know, it was to Shakespeare himself, and just anterior to his departure from London." The memorandum is introduced with the observation, "It seems very likely, from evidence now for the first time to be adduced, that Alleyn became the purchaser of our great dramatist's interest in the theatre, properties, wardrobe, and stock of the Blackfriars." Certainly the document itself says nothing about properties, wardrobe, and stock. It is simply as follows:—

"April 1612.

Money paid by me E. A. for the Blackfryers .	160 li.
More for the Blackfryers	126 li
More againe for the Leasse	310 li
The writings for the same, and other small charges	3 li 6s. 8d."

More than half of the entire sum is paid "again for the lease." If the estimate "For avoiding of the Playhouse," &c., be not rejected as an authority, the conjecture of Mr. Collier that the property purchased by Alleyn belonged to Shakspere is wholly untenable; for the Fee, valued at a thousand pounds, was the property of Burbage, and to the owner of the Fee would be paid the sum for the lease. Subsequent memoranda by Alleyn show that he paid rent for the Blackfriars, and expended sums upon the building—collateral proofs that it was not Shakspere's personal property that he bought in April 1612. There is distinct evidence furnished by another document that Shakspere was not a resident in London in 1613; for in an indenture, executed by him on the 10th of March in that year, for the purchase of a dwelling-house in the precinct of the Blackfriars, he is described as "William Shakespeare of Stratforde Upon Avon in the Countie of Warwick gentleman;" whilst his fellow John Hemings, who is a party to the same deed, is described as "of London, gentleman." From the situation of the property it would appear to have been bought either as an appurtenance to the theatre, or for some protection of the interests of the sharers. In the deed of 1602, Shakspere is also described as of Stratford-upon-Avon. It is natural that he should be so described, in a deed for the purchase of land at Stratford; but, upon the same principle, had he been a resident in London in 1613, he would have been described as of London in a deed for the purchase of property in London. Yet we also look upon this conveyance as evidence that Shakspere had in March 1613 not wholly severed himself from his interest in the theatre. He is in London at the signing of the deed, attending, probably, to the duties which still devolved upon him as a sharer in the Blackfriars. He is not a resident in London; he has come to town, as Thomas Greene describes, in 1614. But we have no evidence that he sold his theatrical property at all. Certainly the evidence that he sold it to Edward Alleyn may be laid aside in any attempt to fix the date of Shakspere's departure from London.

In the November of 1611 two of Shakspere's plays were acted at Whitehall. The entries of their performance are thus given in the "Book of the Revels;"—

"By the Kings Players:	Hallomas nyght was presented att Whithall before ye Kinge Matie a play called the Tempest.
The Kings Players:	The 5th of Nouember; A play called ye winters nighte Tayle."

That "The Tempest" was a new play when thus performed, it would be difficult to

affirm, upon this entry alone. In the earlier part of the reign of James we have seen that old plays of Shakspere were performed before the King ; but at that period all his plays would be equally novel to the Monarch and to the Court. According to the accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber, the performances at Court of the King's players appear to have been so numerous after the year of the accession, that it would be necessary to add the attraction of novelty even to Shakspere's stock plays. At the Christmas and Shrovetide of 1604-5 there were thirteen performances by Shakspere's company ; in 1605-6, ten plays by the same ; in October, 1606, upon the occasion of the visit of the King of Denmark, three plays ; in 1606-7, twenty-two plays ; in 1607-8 there is no record of payments, but in 1608-9 there are twelve plays : in 1610-11 fifteen plays ; and in 1611-12 (the holidays to which we are now more particularly referring) there were six performances by Shakspere's company before the King, and sixteen by the same company "before the Prince's Highness." But however probable it may be that the players would be ready with novelties for the Court, especially when other companies performed constantly before the royal family, we have a distinct record that the plays of Shakspere held their ground, even though the Court was familiar with them. At the Easter of 1618, "Twelfth Night" and "The Winter's Tale" were performed before the King. We are not, therefore, warranted in concluding that in 1611 "The Tempest" was a new play ; although we have evidence that "The Winter's Tale" was then a new play. Dr. Forman saw "The Winter's Tale" at the Globe on the 15th of May, 1611 ; and he describes it with a minuteness which would make it appear that he had not seen it before. This is not conclusive ; but in 1623 "The Winter's Tale" is entered in the Office-Book of the Master of the Revels as an old play, "formerly allowed of by Sir George Bucke." Sir George's term of office commenced in 1610. This fixes the date with tolerable accuracy, and shows that it was not an old play when performed at Court on the 5th of November, 1611. There is a passage in the play which might be implied to refer to the great event of which that day was the anniversary :—

> "If I could find example
> Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
> And flourish'd after, I 'd not do 't : but since
> Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment, bears not one,
> Let villainy itself forswear't."

But there was a more recent example of the fate of one who had struck an anointed king. Henry the Fourth of France was stabbed by Ravaillac on the 14th of May, 1610 ; and certainly the terrible end of the assassin was a warning for "villainy itself" to forswear such a crime. If "The Tempest" and "The Winter's Tale," and probably "Cymbeline" also, belong to this epoch—and we believe that they were separated by a very short interval—we have the most delightful evidence of the perfect healthfulness of Shakspere's mind at this period of his life. To the legendary tales upon which the essentially romantic drama is built, he brought all the graces of his poetry and all the calm reflectiveness of his mature understanding. Beauty and wisdom walked together as twin sisters.

The "Book of the Revels," 1611-12, which thus shows us that the graces of Perdita and the charms of Prospero had shed their influence over the courtly throngs of Whitehall, also informs us that on Twelfth Night the "Prince's Masque" was performed. In the margin there is this entry : "This day the King and Prince with divers of his noblemen did run at the ring for a prize." There was a magnificence about the Court of James at this period which probably had some influence even upon the productions which Shakspere presented to the Court and the people. The romantic incidents of "The Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest," the opportunities

afforded by the construction of their plots for gorgeous scenery, the masque so beautifully interwoven with the loves of Ferdinand and Miranda, all was in harmony with the poetical character of the royal revels. Prince Henry in his premature manhood was distinguished for his skill in all noble exercises. The tournaments of this period were attempts on the part of the Prince to revive the spirit of chivalry. The young man was himself of a high and generous nature; and if he was surrounded by some favourites whose embroidered suits and glittering armour were the coverings of heartless profligacy and low ambition, there were others amongst the courtiers who honestly shared the enthusiasm of Henry, and invoked the genius of chivalry,

"Possess'd with sleep, dead as a lethargy,"

to awake at the name Meliadus.* The "Prince's Masque" was one of those elegant productions of Ben Jonson which have given an immortality to the fleeting pleasures of the nights of Whitehall. Jonson's own descriptions of the scenery of these masques show how much that was beautiful as well as surprising was attempted with imperfect materials. The effects were perhaps very inferior to the scenic displays of the modern stage, though Inigo Jones was the machinist. But the descriptions of these wonders—rocks, and moons, and transparent palaces, and moving chariots—are as vivid as if the early genius of Stanfield had realized the poet's conceptions.†

It was in the spirit of a high literature that the *Masques* of the courts of Elizabeth and James were conceived. The dramatic entertainments—Shakspere's especially—

"——— those flights upon the banks of Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James,"—

were open to all the world; and the great showed their good sense in cherishing those wonderful productions, which could not have been what they are if they had been conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness. But the Masque was essentially courtly and regal. It was produced at great expense. It was, like the Italian Opera, conceived in that artistical spirit which makes its own laws and boundaries. It did not profess to be an imitation of common life. To be understood, it assumed that a certain portion of classical knowledge and taste existed in the spectator. Hurd, in his "Dialogues," says, "I should desire to know what courtly amusements even of our time are comparable to the shows and masques which were the delight and improvement of the court of Elizabeth." The masques of the time of Elizabeth were, however, not in the slightest degree comparable with those produced in the reign of James; in which such men as Jonson, and Daniel, and Fletcher, were the artificers—"artificer" is the expression which Jonson applies to himself in connexion with these performances. The masques of Elizabeth were little more than the old pageants, in which heathen deities walked in procession amidst loud music; and the cloth of gold and the silver tinsel constituted a far higher attraction than the occasional speeches of the performers.

Bacon, whose own mind was essentially poetical, has an essay "Of Masques and Triumphs." His notions are full of taste:—"It is better they should be graced with elegancy than daubed with cost. Dancing to song is a thing of great state and pleasure." Choirs placed one over against another,—scenes abounding with

* The name adopted by the Prince. Drummond called him *Mœliades*, an anagram of *Miles à Deo*.

† See Mr. Peter Cunningham's "Life of Inigo Jones;"—one of those performances in which is shown how accuracy and dulness are not essential companions; how taste and antiquarianism may co-exist.

light,—colours of white, carnation, and a kind of sea-water green,—graceful suits, not after examples of known attires,—sweet odours suddenly coming forth;—these are Bacon's notions of the chief requisites of a masque. His ideas were realized in the masques of Jonson.

The refinements of the Court extended to the people. The Bear-Garden was adapted to theatrical performances; and rendered "convenient in all things both for players to play in, and for the game of bears and bulls to be baited in the same."* The gorgeousness of the scenic displays of Whitehall became at this period a subject of imitation at the public theatres. Sir Henry Wotton thus writes to his nephew on the 6th of July, 1613;—"Now to let matters of state sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Bankside. The King's players had a new play, called, 'All is True,' representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the knights of the order, with their Georges and Garter, the guards with their embroidered coats and the like; sufficient, in truth, within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous." This description, as we believe, applies to the original representation of Shakspere's play of "Henry VIII."† We believe also that Shakspere on this occasion introduced such a compliment to the government of the King as was consistent with the independence of his character and the genuine patriotism that was a part of his nature:—

> "Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
> His honour, and the greatness of his name,
> Shall be, and make new nations."

This is somewhat different from Jonson's compliment to the man:—

> "His meditations, to his height, are even:
> All, all their issue is akin to heaven—
> He is a god o'er kings."‡

And yet it has been said, either that Shakspere condescended to be a flatterer, or that he did not write the compliment to James implied in Cranmer's prophecy. We believe that he did write the lines; that they are not an interpolation; and that, although they may have been written in the spirit of gratitude for personal favours, it is gratitude of the loftiest kind, honourable alike to the giver and to the receiver, because wholly free from adulation.

There was a catastrophe at this representation of the new play "Henry VIII." which may possibly have had some influence upon the future life of Shakspere. Sir Henry Wotton thus describes the burning of the Globe Theatre:—"Now King Henry, making a mask at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming, within less than an hour, the whole house to the very ground." The Globe was re-built in the ensuing spring. The conflagration was so rapid that Prynne wished to show it was a judgment of Providence upon players—"The sudden fearful burning even to the ground." Jonson, in his "Execration upon Vulcan," says the Globe was

> "Raz'd, ere thought could urge, this might have been."

* Collier's "Annals of the Stage," vol. iii., p. 285.
† See "Studies," Book VIII., c. v. ‡ "Masque of Oberon."

It appears likely that this calamity terminated the direct and personal connexion of Shakspere with the London stage. We do not find him associated with the rebuilding of the Globe, nor with any of the schemes for new theatres with which Alleyn and Henslowe were so busy. We have no record whatever of any new play of Shakspere's being produced after this performance of "Henry VIII." at the Globe. Was he wholly idle as a writer? We apprehend not. Of the three Roman plays we have yet to speak.

Every one agrees that during the last three or four years of his life Shakspere ceased to write. Yet we venture to think that every one is in error. The opinion is founded upon a belief that he only finally left London towards the close of 1613. We have shown, from his purchase of a large house at Stratford, his constant acquisition of landed property there, his active engagements in the business of agriculture, the interest which he took in matters connected with his property in which his neighbours had a common interest, that he must have partially left London before this period. There were no circumstances, as far as we can collect, to have prevented him finally leaving London several years before 1613. But his biographers, having fixed a period for the termination of his connexion with the active business of the theatre, assume that he became wholly unemployed; that he gave himself up, as Rowe has described, to "ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends." His income was enough, they say, to dispense with labour; and therefore he did not labour. They have attained to "a perfect conviction, that when Shakspere bade adieu to London, he left it predetermined to devote the residue of his days exclusively to the cultivation of social and domestic happiness in the shades of retirement." These are Dr. Drake's words, who repeats what he has found in Malone and the other commentators. Mr. De Quincey, a biographer of a higher mark, gives a currency to a very similar opinion:—"From 1591 to 1611 are just twenty years, within which space lie the whole dramatic creations of Shakspeare, averaging nearly one for every six months. In 1611 was written 'The Tempest,' which is supposed to have been the last of Shakspeare's works."* "The Tempest" has been held by some to be Shakspere's latest work; as "Twelfth Night" was held by others to be the latest. The conclusion in the case of the "Twelfth Night" had been proved to be far wide of the truth. There was poetry, at any rate, in the belief that he who wrote

> "I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book,"

was "inspired to typify himself;"†—for ever to renounce the spells by which he had bound the subject mind. This is, indeed, poetical; but it is opposed to all the experience of the course of a great intellect. Shakspere had to abjure no "rough magic," such as his Prospero abjured. His "potent art" was built on the calm and equal operations of his surpassing genius. More than half of his life had been employed in the habitual exercise of this power. The strong spur, first of necessity, and secondly of his professional duty, enabled him to wield this power, even amidst the distractions of a life of constant and variable occupation. But when the days of leisure arrived, is it reasonable to believe that the mere habit of his life would not assert its ordinary control; that the greatest of intellects would suddenly sink to the condition of an every-day man—cherishing no high plans for the future, looking

* "Encyclopædia Britannica"—Article, "Shakspeare."
† Campbell—Preface to Moxon's Edition of Shakspeare.

back with no desire to equal and excel the work of the past? At the period of life when Chaucer began to write the "Canterbury Tales," Shakspere, according to his biographers was suddenly and utterly to cease to write. We cannot believe it. Is there a parallel case in the career of any great artist who had won for himself competence and fame? Is the mere applause of the world, and a sufficiency of the goods of life, "the end-all and the be-all" of the labours of a mighty mind? These attained, is the voice of his spiritual being to be heard no more? Are the thoughts with which he daily wrestles to have no utterance? Is he to come down from the mountain from which he had a Pisgah-view of life, and what is beyond life, to walk on the low shore where the other children of humanity pick up shells and pebbles, from the first hour of their being to the last? If those who reason thus could present a satisfactory record of the dates of all Shakspere's works, and especially of his later works, we should still cling to the belief that some fruits of the last years of his literary industry had wholly perished. It is unnecessary, as it appears to us, to adopt any such theory. Without the means of fixing the precise date of many particular dramas, we have indisputable traces, up to this period, of the appearance of at least five-sixths of all Shakspere's undoubted works.* The mention by contemporaries, the notices of their performance at Court, the publications through the press, enable us to assign epochs to a very large number of these works, whether the labours of his youth, his manhood, or his full and riper years. It is not a fanciful theory that these works were produced in cycles; that at one period he saw the capabilities of the English history for dramatic representation; at another poured forth the brilliancy of his wit and the richness of his humour in a succession of heart-inspiriting comedies; at another conceived those great tragic creations which have opened a new world to him who would penetrate into the depths of the human mind; taking a loftier range even in his lighter efforts, at another time shedding the light of his philosophy and the richness of his poetry over the regions of romantic fiction, while other men would have been content to amuse by the power of a well-constructed plot and a rapid succession of incidents. Are there any dramas which belong to a class not yet described—dramas whose individual appearance is not accounted for by those who have attempted to fix the exact chronology of other plays? There is such a class. It is formed of the three great Roman plays of "Coriolanus," "Julius Cæsar," and "Antony and Cleopatra." In our "Studies" of those plays we have stated every circumstance by which Malone and others attempted to fix their date as between 1607 and 1610. There is not one atom of evidence upon the subject beyond the solitary fact that "A book called Anthony and Cleopatra," without the name of Shakspere as its author, was entered at Stationers' Hall on the 20th of May, 1608. Every other entry of a play by Shakspere has preceded the publication of the play, whether piratical or otherwise. The "Antony and Cleopatra" of Shakspere was not published till fifteen years afterwards; it was entered in 1623 by the publishers of the folio as one of the copies "not formerly entered to other men." And yet we are told that the entry of 1608 is decisive as to the date of Shakspere's "Antony and Cleopatra." The conjectures of Malone and Chalmers, which would decide the dates of these great plays by some fancied allusion, are more than usually trivial. What they are we need not here repeat.

The lines prefixed by Leonard Digges to the first collected edition of Shakspere's works would seem to imply that "Julius Cæsar" had been acted, and was popular:—

> "Nor fire nor cank'ring age, as Naso said
> Of his, thy wit-fraught book shall once invade;

* See "Studies," p. 40.

> Nor shall I e'er believe or think thee dead
> (Though miss'd) until our bankrout stage be sped
> (Impossible!) with some new strain'd t' outdo
> Passions of Juliet and her Romeo;
> Or till I hear a scene more nobly take
> Than when thy half-sword parleying Romans spake."

The "half-sword parleying Romans" alludes, there can be little doubt, to the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius; and this is evidence that the play was performed before the publication of Digges's verses. We believe that it was performed during Shakspere's lifetime. Malone says, "It appears by the papers of the late Mr. George Vertue, that a play called 'Cæsar's Tragedy' was acted at Court before the 10th of April, in the year 1613." We agree with Malone that this was probably Shakspere's "Julius Cæsar." That noble tragedy is in every respect an acting play. It is not too long for representation; it has no scenes in which the poet seems to have abandoned himself to the inspiration of his subject, postponing the work of curtailment till the necessities of the stage should demand it. Not so was "Coriolanus;" not so especially was "Antony and Cleopatra." They each contain more lines than any other of Shakspere's plays; they are each nearly a third longer than "Julius Cæsar." It is our belief that they were not acted in Shakspere's lifetime; and that his fellows, the editors of the folio in 1623, had the honesty to publish them from the posthumous manuscripts, uncurtailed. In their existing state they are not only too long for representation, but they exhibit evidence of that exuberance which characterises the original execution of a great work of art, when the artist, throwing all his vigour into the conception, leaves for a future period the rejection or compression of passages, however splendid they may be, which impede the progress of the action, and destroy that proportion which must never be sacrificed even to individual beauty. We know that this was the principle upon which Shakspere worked in the correction of his greatest efforts—his "Hamlet," his "Lear," his "Othello." We believe that "Coriolanus" and "Antony and Cleopatra" have come down to us uncorrected; that they were posthumous works; that the intellect which could not remain inactive conceived a mighty plan, of which these glorious performances were the commencement; that Shakspere, calmly meditating upon the grandeur of the Roman story, seeing how fitted it was, not only for the display of character and passion, but for profound manifestations of the aspects of social life, ever changing and ever the same, had conceived the sublime project of doing for Rome what he had done for England. He has exhibited to us the republic in her youthfulness, and her decrepitude; her struggle against the sovereignty of one; the great contest for a principle terminating in ruin; an empire established by cunning and proscription. There were, behind, the great annals of Imperial Rome; a story perhaps unequalled for the purposes of the philosophical dramatist, but one which the greatest who had ever attempted to connect the actions and motives of public men and popular bodies with lofty poetry, not didactic but "ample and true with life," was not permitted to touch. The marvellous accuracy, the real substantial learning, of the three Roman plays of Shakspere, present the most complete evidence to our minds that they were the result of a profound study of the whole range of Roman history, including the nicer details of Roman manners, not in those days to be acquired in a compendious form, but to be brought out by diligent reading alone. It is pleasant to believe that the last years of Shakspere's life were those of an earnest student. We confidently ask if the belief be not a reasonable one?

[Chancel of Stratford Church.]

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST BIRTHDAY.

The happy quiet of Shakspere's retreat was not wholly undisturbed by calamity, domestic and public. His brother Richard, who was ten years his junior, was buried at Stratford on the 4th of February, 1613. Of his father's family his sister Joan, who had married Mr. William Hart of Stratford, was probably the only other left. There is no record of the death of his brother Gilbert; but as he is not mentioned in the will of William, in all likelihood he died before him. Oldys, in his manu-

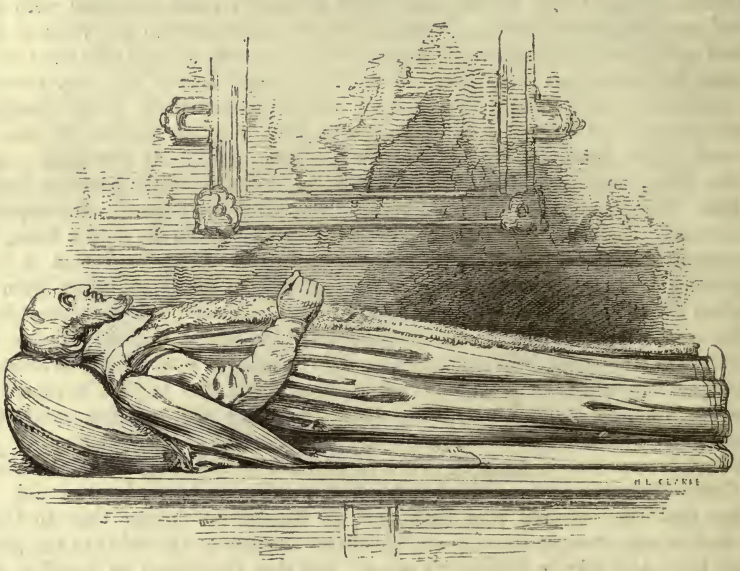
script notes upon Langbaine, has a story of "one of Shakspeare's younger brothers, who lived to a good old age, even some years, as I compute, after the restoration of King Charles II." Gilbert was born in 1566; so that if he had lived some years after the restoration of Charles II., it is not surprising that "his memory was weakened," as Oldys reports, and that he could give "the most noted actors" but "little satisfaction in their endeavours to learn something from him of his brother." The story of Oldys is clearly apocryphal, as far as regards any brother of Shakspere's. They were a short-lived race. His sister, indeed, survived him thirty years. The family at New Place, at this period, would be composed therefore of his wife only, and his unmarried daughter Judith; unless his eldest daughter and his son-in-law formed a part of the same household, with their only child Elizabeth, who was born in 1608. The public calamity to which we have alluded was a great fire, which broke out at Stratford on the 9th of July, 1614; and "within the space of two hours consumed and burnt fifty and four dwelling-houses, many of them being very fair houses, besides barns, stables, and other houses of office, together with great store of corn, hay, straw, wood, and timber therein, amounting to the value of eight hundred pounds and upwards: the force of which fire was so great (the wind setting full upon the town), that it dispersed into so many places thereof, whereby the whole town was in very great danger to have been utterly consumed."* That Shakspere assisted with all the energy of his character in alleviating the miseries of this calamity, and in the restoration of his town, we cannot doubt. In the same year we find him taking some interest in the project of an inclosure of the common-fields of Stratford. The inclosure would probably have improved his property, and especially have increased the value of the tithes, of the moiety of which he held a lease. The Corporation of Stratford were opposed to the inclosure. They held that it would be injurious to the poorer inhabitants, who were then deeply suffering from the desolation of the fire; and they appear to have been solicitous that Shakspere should take the same view of the matter as themselves. His friend William Combe, then high sheriff of the county, was a principal person engaged in forwarding the inclosure. The Corporation sent their common clerk, Thomas Greene, to London, to oppose the project; and a memorandum in his hand-writing, which still remains, exhibits the business-like manner in which Shakspere informed himself of the details of the plan. The first memorandum is dated the 17th of November, 1614, and is as follows:—"My Cosen Shakspeare comyng yesterday to town, I went to see how he did. He told me that they assured him they ment to inclose no further than to Gospel Bush, and so upp straight (leaving out pt. of the Dyngles to the field) to the gate in Clopton hedg, and take in Salisbury's peece; and that they mean in Aprill to svey. the land and then to gyvé satisfaccion, and not before: and he and Mr. Hall say they think yr. will be nothyng done at all." Mr. Greene appears to have returned to Stratford in about a fortnight after the date of this memorandum, and Shakspere seems to have remained in London; for according to a second memorandum, which is damaged and partly illegible, an official letter was written to Shakspere by the Corporation, accompanied by a private letter from Mr. Greene, moving him to exert his influence against this plan of the inclosure:—"23 Dec. A. Hall, Lres. wrytten, one to Mr. Manyring—another to Mr. Shakspeare, with almost all the company's hands to eyther. I also wrytte myself to my Csn. Shakspear, the coppyes of all our . . . . . then also a note of the inconvenyences wold . . . by the inclosure." Arthur Mannering, to whom one of these letters was written by the Corporation, was officially connected with the Lord Chancellor, and then residing at his house;

* Brief granted for the relief of the inhabitants, on the 11th of May, 1615, quoted from Wheler's "History of Stratford," p. 15.

and from the letter to him, which has been preserved, "it appears that he was apprised of the injury to be expected from the intended inclosure ; reminded of the damage that Stratford, then 'lying in the ashes of desolation,' had sustained from recent fires ; and entreated to forbear the inclosure."* The letter to Shakspere has not been discovered. The fact of its having been written leaves no doubt of the importance which was attached to his opinion by his neighbours. Truly, in his later years he had

"Honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

John Combe, the old companion of Shakspere, died at the very hour that the great fire was raging at Stratford. According to the inscription on his monument he died on the 10th of July, 1614. Upon his tomb is a fine recumbent figure, executed by the same sculptor who, a few years later, set up in the same Chancel a monument to one who, "when that stone is rent," shall still be "fresh to all ages."



[Monument of John Combe.]

Shakspere was at this period fifty years old. He was in all probability healthful and vigorous. His life was a pure and simple one ; and its chances of endurance were the greater, that high intellectual occupation, not forced upon him by necessity, varied the even course of his tranquil existence. His retrospections of the past would, we believe, be eminently happy. His high talents had been employed not only profitably to himself, but for the advantage of his fellow-creatures. He had begun life obscurely, the member of a profession which was scarcely more than tolerated. He had found the stage brutal and licentious. There were worse faults belonging to the early drama than its ignorant coarseness. It was adapted only for a rude audience in its strong excitement and its low ribaldry. He saw that the drama was to be made a great teacher. He saw that the highest things in the region of poetry were akin to the natural feelings in the commonest natures.

* Wheler's "Guide to Stratford."

He would make the noblest dramatic creations the most popular. He knew that the wit that was unintelligible to the multitude was not true wit,—that the passion which did not move them to tears or anger was not real passion. He had raised a despised branch of literature into the highest art. He must have felt that he had produced works which could never die. It was not the applause of princes, or even the breath of admiring crowds, that told him this. He would look upon his own great creations as works of art, no matter by whom produced, to be compared with the performances of other men,—to be measured by that high ideal standard which was a better test than any such comparisons. Shakspere could not have mistaken his own intellectual position; for if ever there was a mind entirely free from that self-consciousness which substitutes individual feelings for general truths, it was Shakspere's mind. To one who is perfectly familiar with his works, they come more and more to appear as emanations of the pure intellect, totally disconnected from the personal relations of the being which has produced them. Whatever might have been the worldly trials of such a mind, it had within itself the power of rising superior to every calamity. Although the career of Shakspere was prosperous, he may have felt "the proud man's contumely," if not "the oppressor's wrong." If we are to trust his Sonnets, he did feel these things. But he dwelt habitually in a region above these clouds of common life. He suffered family bereavements; yet he chronicled not his sorrows with that false sentimentality which calls upon the world to see how graceful it is to weep. In his impersonations of feeling he has looked at death under every aspect with which the human mind views the last great change. To the thoughtless and selfish Claudio,

> "The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ach, penury, and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death."

To the philosophical Duke life is a thing

> "That none but fools would keep."

To Hamlet, whose conscience [consciousness] "puzzles the will,"

> "The dread of something after death"

"makes cowards of us all." To Prospero the whole world is as perishable as the life of man:

> "The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Shakspere, when he speaks in a tone approaching to that of personal feeling, looks upon death with the common eye of humanity:

> "That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
> In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,
> Which by and by black night doth take away,
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest."
>
> *Sonnet* lxxiii.

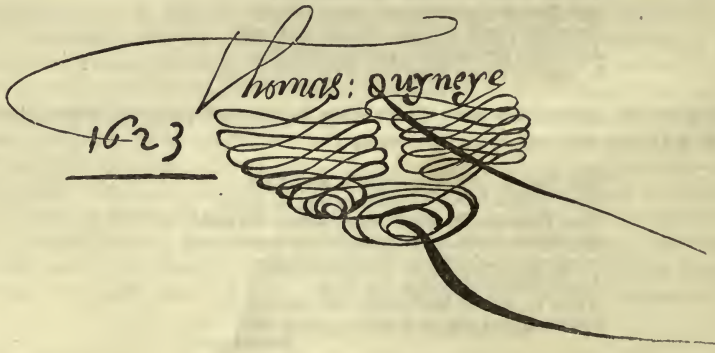
He dwells in the place of his birth, and when he asks, "the friends of my childhood where are they? an echo answers, where are they." Some few remain;—the hoary-headed eld that he remembered fresh and full of hope. Ever and anon as he rambles

[Weston Church.]

through the villages where he rambled in his boyhood, the head of some one is laid under the turf whose name he remembers as the foremost at barley-break or foot-ball.

> "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death."

The younger daughter of Shakspere was married on the 10th of February, 1616, to Thomas Quiney, as the register of Stratford shows. Thomas Quiney was the son of Richard Quiney of Stratford, whom we have seen in 1598 soliciting the kind offices of his loving countryman Shakspere. Thomas, who was born in 1588, was probably a well-educated man. At any rate he was a great master of calligraphy, as his signature attests,—a plain signature, that un-palæographic men may read:—



The last will of Shakspere would appear to have been prepared in some degree with reference to this marriage. It is dated the 25th of March, 1616; but the word "Januarii" seems to have been first written and afterwards struck out, "Martii" having been written above it. It is not unlikely, and indeed it appears most probable, that the document was prepared before the marriage of Judith; for the elder daughter is mentioned as Susanna Hall,—the younger simply as Judith. To her, one hundred pounds is bequeathed, and fifty pounds conditionally. The life-interest of a further sum of one hundred and fifty pounds is also bequeathed to her, with remainder to her children; but if she died without issue within three years after the date of the will, the hundred and fifty pounds was to be otherwise appropriated. We pass over the various legacies to relations and friends * to come to the bequest of the great bulk of the property. All the real estate is devised to his daughter Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life. It is then entailed upon her first son and his heirs male; and in default of such issue, to her second son and his heirs male; and so on: in default of such issue, to his granddaughter Elizabeth Hall (called in the language of the time his "niece"): and in default of such issue, to his daughter Judith, and her heirs male. By this strict entailment it was manifestly the object of Shakspere to found a family. Like many other such purposes of short-sighted humanity the object was not accomplished. His elder daughter had no issue but Elizabeth, and she died childless. The heirs male of Judith died before her. The estates were scattered after the second generation; and the descendants of his sister were the only transmitters to posterity of his blood and lineage.†

"Item, I give unto my wife my second-best bed, with the furniture." This is the clause of the will upon which, for half a century, all men believed that Shakspere recollected his wife only to mark how little he esteemed her,—to "cut her off, not indeed with a shilling, but with an old bed." We had the satisfaction of first showing the utter groundlessness of this opinion, and it is pleasant to know, that the statement which we originally published, some ten years ago, is now fully acquiesced in by all writers on Shakspere. But it was once very different. To show the universality of the former belief in such a charge, we will first exhibit it in the words of one, himself a poet, who cannot be suspected of any desire to depreciate the greatest master of his art. Mr. Moore, in his "Life of Byron," speaking of unhappy marriages with reference to the domestic misfortune of his noble friend, thus expresses himself:—

"By whatever austerity of temper, or habits, the poets Dante and Milton may have drawn upon themselves such a fate, it might be expected that, at least, the 'gentle Shakspere' would have stood exempt from the common calamity of his brethren. But, among the very few facts of his life that have been transmitted to us, there is none more clearly proved than the unhappiness of his marriage. The dates of the births of his children, compared with that of his removal from Stratford,—the total omission of his wife's name in the first draft of his will, and the bitter sarcasm of the bequest by which he remembers her afterwards, all prove beyond a doubt both his separation from the lady early in life, and his unfriendly feeling towards her at the close of it.

"In endeavouring to argue against the conclusion naturally to be deduced from this will, Boswell, with a strange ignorance of human nature, remarks,—'If he had taken offence at any part of his wife's conduct, I cannot believe he would have taken this petty mode of expressing it.'"

Stevens, amongst many faults of taste, has the good sense and the good feeling

* See the Will in the Appendix.

† See notes on some points of the Will: Appendix.

to deny the inferences of Malone in this matter of the "old bed." He considers this bequest "a mark of peculiar tenderness;" and he assumes that she was provided for by settlement. Stevens was a conveyancer by profession. Malone, who was also at the bar, says, "what provision was made for her by settlement does not appear." A writer in "Lardner's Cyclopædia" doubts the legal view of the matter which Stevens charitably takes:—"Had he already provided for her? If so, he would surely have alluded to the fact; and if he had left her the interest of a specific sum, or the rent of some messuage, there would, we think, have been a stipulation for the reversion of the property to his children after her decease." Boswell, a third legal editor, thus writes upon the same subject;—"*If* we may suppose that some provision had been made for her during his lifetime, the bequest of his second-best bed was probably considered in those days neither as uncommon or reproachful." As a somewhat parallel example Boswell cites the will of Sir Thomas Lucy, in 1600, who gives his son his second-best horse, but no land, because his father-in-law had promised to provide for him. We will present our readers with a case in which the parallel is much closer. In the will of David Cecil, Esq., grandfather to the great Lord Burleigh, we find the following bequest to his wife:—

"*Item—I will that my wife have all the plate that was hers before I married her; and twenty kye and a bull.*"*

Our readers will recollect the query of the Cyclopædist,—"Had he already provided for her? If so, he would surely have alluded to the fact." Poor Dame Cecil, according to this interpretation, had no resource but that of milking her twenty kye, kept upon the common, and eating sour curds out of a silver bowl.

The "forgetfulness" and the "neglect" by Shakspere of the partner of his fortunes for more than thirty years is good-naturedly imputed by Stevens to "the indisposed and sickly fit." Malone will not have it so:—"The various regulations and provisions of our author's will show that at the time of making it *he had the entire use of his faculties.*" We thoroughly agree with Malone in this particular. Shakspere bequeaths to his second daughter three hundred pounds under certain conditions; to his sister money, wearing apparel, and a life interest in the house where she lives; to his nephews five pounds each; to his grand-daughter his plate; to the poor ten pounds; to various friends, money, rings, his sword. The chief bequest, that of his *real* property, is as follows:—

"Item—I give, will, bequeath, and devise, unto my daughter, Susanna Hall, for better enabling of her to perform this my will, and towards the performance thereof, all that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called the New Place, wherein I now dwell, and two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford aforesaid; and all my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever, situate, lying, and being, or to be had, received, perceived, or taken, within the towns, hamlets, villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or in any of them, in the said county of Warwick; and also that messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, wherein one John Robinson dwelleth, situate, lying, and being in the Blackfriars in London, near the Wardrobe; and all other my lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever: to have and to hold all and singular the said premises, with their appurtenances, unto the said Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life; and after her decease to the first son of her body lawfully issuing," &c.

Immediately after this clause,—by which all the *real* property is bequeathed to

* Peck's "Desiderata Curiosa," lib. iii., No 2.

Susanna Hall, for her life, and then entailed upon her heirs male; and in default of such issue upon his grand-daughter, and her heirs male; and in default of such issue upon his daughter Judith and her heirs male,—comes the clause relating to his wife:—

"*Item—I give unto my wife my second-best bed, with the furniture.*"

It was the object of Shakspere by this will to perpetuate *a family estate.* In doing so did he neglect the duty and affection which he owed to his wife? He did not.

Shakspere knew the law of England better than his legal commentators. His estates, with the exception of a copyhold tenement, expressly mentioned in his will, were *freehold.* HIS WIFE WAS ENTITLED TO DOWER. She was provided for, as the wife of David Cecil was provided for, who, without doubt, was not "cut off" with her own plate and twenty kye and a bull. She was provided for amply, *by the clear and undeniable operation of the English law.* Of the lands, houses, and gardens which Shakspere *inherited* from his father, she was assured of the life-interest of a third, should she survive her husband, the instant that old John Shakspere died. Of the capital messuage, called New Place, the best house in Stratford, which Shakspere purchased in 1597, she was assured of the same life-interest, from the moment of the conveyance, provided it was a direct conveyance to her husband. That it was so conveyed we may infer from the terms of the conveyance of the lands in Old Stratford, and other places, which were purchased by Shakspere in 1602, and were then conveyed "to the onlye proper use and behoofe of the saide William Shakespere, his heires and assignes, for ever." Of a life-interest in a third of these lands also was she assured. The tenement in Blackfriars, purchased in 1614, was conveyed to Shakspere and *three other persons;* and after his death was re-conveyed by those persons to the uses of his will, "for and in performance of the confidence and trust in them reposed by William Shakespeare deceased." In this estate certainly the widow of our poet had not dower. The reason is pretty clear—it was theatrical property. It has been remarked to us that even the express mention of the second-best bed was anything but unkindness and insult; that the best bed was in all probability an heir-loom: it might have descended to Shakspere himself from his father as an heir-loom, and, as such, was the property of his own heirs. The best bed was considered amongst the most important of those chattels which went to the heir by custom with the house. "And note that in some places chattels as heir-looms (as the best bed, table, pot, pan, cart, and other dead chattels moveable) may go to the heir, and the heir in that case may have an action for them at the common law, and shall not sue for them in the ecclesiastical court; but the heir-loom is due by custom, and not by the common law."*

It is unnecessary for us more minutely to enter into the question before us. It is sufficient for us to have the satisfaction of having first pointed out the *absolute certainty* that the wife of Shakspere was provided for by the natural operation of the law of England. She could not have been deprived of this provision except by the legal process of Fine,—the *voluntary* renunciation of her own right. If her husband had alienated his real estates she might still have held her right, even against a purchaser. In the event, which we believe to be improbable, that she and the "gentle Shakspere" lived on terms of mutual unkindness, she would have refused to renounce the right which the law gave her. In the more probable case, that, surrounded with mutual friends and relations, they lived at least amicably, she could not have been asked to resign it. In the most probable case, that they lived affectionately, the legal provision of dower

* "Coke upon Littleton," 18 b.

would have been regarded as the natural and proper arrangement—so natural and usual as not to be referred to in a will. By reference to other wills of the same period it may be seen how unusual it was to make any other provision for a wife than by *dower*. Such a provision in those days, when the bulk of property was *real*, was a matter of course. The solution which we have here offered to this long-disputed question supersedes the necessity of any *conjecture* as to the nature of the provision which those who reverence the memory of Shakspere *must* hold he made for his wife. Amongst those conjectures the most plausible has proceeded from the zealous desire of Mr. Brown* to remove an unmerited stigma from the memory of our poet. He believes that provision was made for Shakspere's widow through his theatrical property, which he imagines was assigned to her. Such a conjecture, true as it may still be, is not necessary for the vindication of Shakspere's sense of justice. We are fortunate in having first presented the true solution of the difficulty. There are lines in Shakspere, familiar to all, which would have pointed to it:—

> "Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
> Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
> Another moon; but, oh, methinks how slow
> This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires
> Like to a step-dame, or a DOWAGER †
> Long withering out a young man's revenue."
>
> *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I. Sc. I.

The will of Shakspere thus commences:—"I, William Shakspere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., in perfect health and memory, (God be praised!) do make and ordain this my last will and testament." And yet within one month of this declaration William Shakspere is no more:

OBIIT ANO. DOI. 1616. ÆTATIS 53. DIE 23. AP.

Such is the inscription on his tomb. It is corroborated by the register of his burial:—

"April 25, Will. Shakspere, Gent."

Writing forty-six years after the event, the vicar of Stratford says, "Shakspere, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakspere died of a fever there contracted." A tradition of this nature, surviving its object nearly half a century, is not much to be relied on. But if it were absolutely true, our reverence for Shakspere would not be diminished by the fact that he accelerated his end in the exercise of hospitality, according to the manner of his age, towards two of the most illustrious of his friends. The "merry meeting," the last of many social hours spent with the full-hearted Jonson and the elegant Drayton, may be contemplated without a painful feeling. Shakspere possessed a mind eminently social—"he was of a free and generous nature." But, says the tradition of half a century, "he drank too hard" at this "merry meeting." We believe that this is the vulgar colouring of a common incident. He "died of a fever there contracted." The fever that is too often the attendant upon a hot

* "Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems."

† *Dowager* is here used in the original sense of a widow receiving *dower* out of the "revenue" which has descended to the heir with this customary charge.

spring, when the low grounds upon a river bank have been recently inundated, is a fever that the good people of Stratford did not well understand at that day. The "merry meeting" rounded off a tradition much more effectively. Whatever was the immediate cause of his last illness, we may well believe that the closing scene was full of tranquillity and hope; and that he who had sought, perhaps more than any man, to look beyond the material and finite things of the world, should rest at last in the "peace which passeth all understanding"—in that assured belief which the opening of his will has expressed with far more than formal solemnity:—"I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting."

[END OF THE BIOGRAPHY.]

[Monument at Stratford.]

APPENDIX.

I.—SHAKSPERE'S WILL.

"*Vicesimo quinto die Martii, Anno Regni Domini nostri Jacobi nunc Regis Angliæ, &c. decimo quarto, et Scotiæ quadragesimo nono. Anno Domini* 1616.

"In the name of God, Amen. I, William Shakspere, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., in perfect health and memory, (God be praised!) do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following; that is to say:

"*First*, I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping, and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting; and my body to the earth whereof it is made.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my daughter Judith one hundred and fifty pounds of lawful English money, to be paid unto her in manner and form following; that is to say, one hundred pounds in discharge of her marriage portion within one year after my decease, with consideration after the rate of two shillings in the pound for so long time as the same shall be unpaid unto her after my decease; and the fifty pounds residue thereof, upon her surrendering of, or giving of such sufficient security as the overseers of this my will shall like of, to surrender or grant, all her estate and right that shall descend or come unto her after my decease, or that she now hath, of, in, or to, one copyhold tenement, with the appurtenances, lying and being in Stratford-upon-Avon aforesaid, in the said county of Warwick, being parcel or holden of the manor of Rowington, unto my daughter Susanna Hall, and her heirs for ever.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my said daughter Judith one hundred and fifty pounds more, if she, or any issue of her body, be living at the end of three years next ensuing the day of the date of this my will, during which time my executors are to pay her consideration from my decease according to the rate aforesaid: and if she die within the said term without issue of her body, then my will is, and I do give and bequeath one hundred pounds thereof to my niece Elizabeth Hall, and the fifty pounds to be set forth by my executors during the life of my sister Joan Hart, and the use and profit thereof coming, shall be paid to my said sister Joan, and after her decease the said fifty pounds shall remain amongst the children of my said sister, equally to be divided amongst them; but if my said daughter Judith be living at the end of the said three years, or any issue of her body, then my will is, and so I devise and bequeath, the said hundred and fifty pounds to be set out by my executors and overseers for the best benefit of her and her issue, and the stock not to be paid unto her so long as she shall be married and covert baron; but my will is, that she shall have the consideration yearly paid unto her during her life, and after her decase the said stock and consideration to be paid to her children, if she have any, and if not, to her executors or assigns, she living the said term after my decease: provided that if such husband as she shall at the end of the said three years be married unto, or at any [time] after, do sufficiently assure unto her, and the issue of her body, lands answerable to the portion by this my will given unto her, and to be adjudged so by my executors and overseers, then my will is, that the said hundred and fifty pounds shall be paid to such husband as shall make such assurance, to his own use.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto my said sister Joan twenty pounds, and all my wearing apparel, to be paid and delivered within one year after my decease; and I do will and devise unto her the house, with the appurtenances, in Stratford, wherein she dwelleth, for her natnatural life, under the yearly rent of twelve-pence.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto her three sons, William Hart, Thomas Hart, and Michael Hart, five pounds a piece, to be paid within one year after my decease.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto the said Elizabeth Hall all my plate (except my broad silver and gilt bowl) that I now have at the date of this my will.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath unto the poor of Stratford aforesaid ten pounds; to Mr. Thomas Combe my sword; to Thomas Russel, esq., five pounds; and to Francis Collins of the borough of Warwick, in the county of Warwick, gent., thirteen pounds six shillings and eight-pence, to be paid within one year after my decease.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath to Hamlet [*Hamnet*] Sadler twenty-six shillings eight-pence, to buy him a ring; to William Reynolds, gent., twenty-six shillings eight-pence, to buy him a ring; to my godson William Walker, twenty shillings in gold; to Anthony Nash, gent., twenty-six shillings eight-pence; and to Mr. John Nash, twenty-six shillings eight-pence; and to my fellows, John Hemynge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, twenty-six shillings eight-pence apiece, to buy them rings.

"*Item*, I give, will, bequeath, and devise, unto my daughter, Susanna Hall, for better enabling of her to perform this my will, and towards the performance thereof, all that capital messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, in Stratford aforesaid, called The New Place, wherein I now dwell, and two messuages or tenements, with the appurtenances, situate, lying, and being in Henley Street, within the borough of Stratford aforesaid; and all my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever, situate, lying, and being, or to be had, received, perceived, or taken, within the towns, hamlets villages, fields, and grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, or in any of them, in the said county of Warwick; and also all that messuage or tenement, with the appurtenances, wherein one John Robinson dwelleth, situate, lying, and being, in the Blackfriars

in London, near the Wardrobe; and all other my lands, tenements, and hereditaments whatsoever; to have and to hold all and singular the said premises with their appurtenances, unto the said Susanna Hall, for and during the term of her natural life; and after her decease to the first son of her body lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said first son lawfully issuing, and for default of such issue, to the second son of her body lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said second son lawfully issuing; and for default of such heirs, to the third son of the body of the said Susanna lawfully issuing, and to the heirs males of the body of the said third son lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, the same so to be and remain to the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons of her body, lawfully issuing one after another, and to the heirs males of the bodies of the said fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sons lawfully issuing, in such manner as it is before limited to be and remain, to the first, second, and third sons of her body, and to their heirs males; and for default of such issue, the said premises to be and remain to my said niece Hall, and the heirs males of her body lawfully issuing; for default of such issue, to my daughter Judith, and the heirs males of her body lawfully issuing; and for default of such issue, to the right heirs of me the said William Shakspeare for ever.

"*Item*, I give unto my wife my second best bed, with the furniture.

"*Item*, I give and bequeath to my said daughter Judith my broad silver gilt bowl. All the rest of my goods, chattels, leases, plate, jewels, and household-stuff whatsoever, after my debts and legacies paid, and my funeral expenses discharged, I give, devise, and bequeath to my son-in-law, John Hall, gent., and my daughter Susanna his wife, whom I ordain and make executors of this my last will and testament. And I do entreat and appoint the said Thomas Russel, esq., and Francis Collins, gent., to be overseers hereof. And do revoke all former wills, and publish this to be my last will and testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand, the day and year first above-written.

"By me, William Shakspere.

"*Witness to the publishing hereof*,

Fra. Collyns,
Julius Shaw,
John Robinson,
Hamnet Sadler,
Robert Whattcoat.

"*Probatum fuit testamentum suprascriptum apud London, coram Magistro William Byrde, Legum Doctore, &c. vicesimo secundo die mensis Junii, Anno Domini* 1616*; juramento Johannis Hall unius ex. cui, &c. de bene, &c. jurat. reservata potestate, &c. Susannæ Hall, alt. ex. &c. eam cum venerit &c. petitur. &c.*"

II.—SOME POINTS OF SHAKSPERE'S WILL.

THE solemn clause, "My body to the earth whereof it is made," was carried into effect by the burial of William Shakspere in the chancel of his parish church. A tomb, of which we shall presently speak more particularly, was erected to his memory before 1623. The following lines are inscribed beneath the bust:

"IVDICIO PYLIVM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM,
TERRA TEGIT, POPVLVS MÆRET, OLYMPVS HABET.

STAY PASSENGER, WHY GOEST THOV BY SO FAST,
READ, IF THOV CANST, WHOM ENVIOVS DEATH HATH PLAST
WITHIN THIS MONVMENT, SHAKSPEARE, WITH WHOME
QVICK NATVRE DIDE; WHOSE NAME DOTH DECK YS. TOMBE
FAR MORE THEN COST; SITH ALL YT. HE HATH WRITT
LEAVES LIVING ART BVT PAGE TO SERVE HIS WITT.
OBIIT ANO. DOI. 1616. ÆTATIS 53. DIE 23. AP."

Below the monument, but at a few paces from the wall, is a flat stone, with the following extraordinary inscription:

GOOD FREND FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE,
TO DIGG T-E DUST ENCLOASED HEARE:
BLESTE BE $\frac{E}{Y}$ MAN $\frac{T}{Y}$ SPARES THES STONES,
AND CURST BE HE $\frac{T}{Y}$ MOVES MY BONES.

In a letter from Warwickshire, in 1693,* the writer, after describing the monument to Shakspere, and giving its inscription, says, "Near the wall where this monument is erected lies the plain free-stone underneath which his body is buried, with this epitaph made by himself a little before his death." He then gives the epitaph, and subsequently adds, "Not one for fear of the curse above-said dare touch his grave-stone, though his wife and daughters did earnestly desire to be laid in the same grave with him." This information is given by the tourist upon the authority of the clerk who showed him the church, who "was above eighty years old." Here is unquestionable authority for the existence of this free-stone seventy-seven years after the death of Shakspere. We have an earlier authority. In a plate to Dugdale's "Antiquities of Warwickshire," first published in 1656, we have a representation of Shakspere's tomb, with the following: "Neare the wall where this monument is erected, lyeth a plain free-stone, underneath which his body is buried, with this epitaph

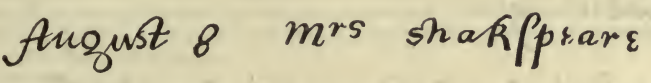
"Good frend," &c.

But it is very remarkable, we think, that this plain free-stone does not bear the name of Shakspere—has nothing to establish the fact that the stone originally belonged to his grave. We apprehend that during the period that elapsed between his death and the setting-up of the monument, a stone was temporarily placed over the grave; and that the warning not to touch the bones was the stonemason's invention, to secure their reverence till a fitting monument should be prepared, if the stone were not ready in his yard to serve for any grave. We quite agree with Mr. De Quincey that this doggrel attributed to Shakspere is "equally below his intellect no less than his scholarship," and we hold with him that "as a sort of *siste viator*

* Published from the original manuscript by Mr. Rodd, 1838.

appeal to future sextons, it is worthy of the grave-digger or the parish-clerk, who was probably its author."

The bequest of the second-best bed to his wife was an interlineation in Shakspere's Will. "He had forgot her," says Malone. There was another bequest which was also an interlineation: "To my fellows, John Hemynge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, twenty-six shillings eightpence apiece, to buy them rings." It is not unlikely that these companions of his professional life derived substantial advantages from his death, and probably paid him an annuity after his retirement. The bequest of the rings marked his friendship to them, as the bequest of the bed his affection to his wife. She died on the 6th of August, 1623, and was buried on the 8th, according to the register

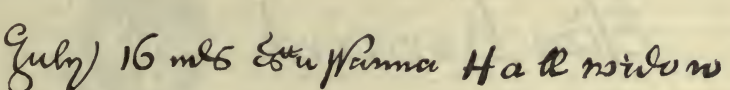


Her grave-stone is next to the stone with the doggrel inscription, but nearer to the north wall, upon which Shakspere's monument is placed. The stone has a brass plate, with the following inscription:

"HEERE LYETH INTERRED THE BODY OF ANNE, WIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, WHO DEPTED. THIS LIFE THE 6TH DAY OF AVGV, 1623, BEING OF THE AGE OF 67 YEARES."

"VBERA, TU MATER, TU LAC VITAMQ. DEDISTI,
VÆ MIHI PRO TANTO MUNERE SAXA DABO.
QUAM MALLEM, AMOUEAT LAPIDEM, BONUS ANGEL' ORE'
EXEAT UT CHRISTI CORPUS, IMAGO TUA?
SED NIL VOTA VALENT, VENIAS CITO CHRISTE RESURGET,
CLAUSA LICET TUMULO MATER, ET ASTRA PETET."

It is evident that the epitaph was intended to express the deep affection of her daughter, to whom Shakspere bequeathed a life interest in his real property, and the bulk of his personal. The widow of Shakspere in all likelihood resided with this elder daughter. It is possible that they formed one family previous to his death. That daughter died on the 11th of July, 1649, having survived her husband, Dr. Hall, fourteen years. She is described as widow in the register of burials:



Ranging with the other stones, but nearer the south wall, is a flat stone now bearing the following inscription:

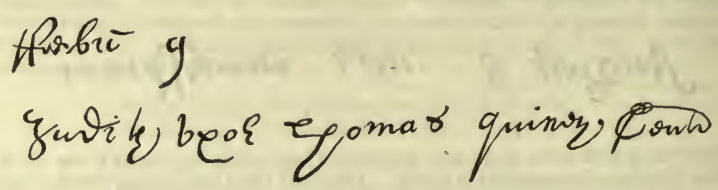
"HEERE LYETH YE. BODY OF SVSANNA, WIFE TO JOHN HALL, GENT. YE. DAVGHTER OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, GENT. SHEE DECEASED YE. 11TH OF JVLY, AO. 1649, AGED 66."

On the same stone is an inscription for Richard Watts, who had no relationship to Shakspere or his descendants. Fortunately Dugdale preserved an inscription which the masons of Stratford obliterated, to make room for the record of Richard Watts, who thus attained a distinction to which he had no claim. A liberal admirer of Shakspere, himself an elegant writer, the Rev. W. Harness, has restored the inscription at his own cost:

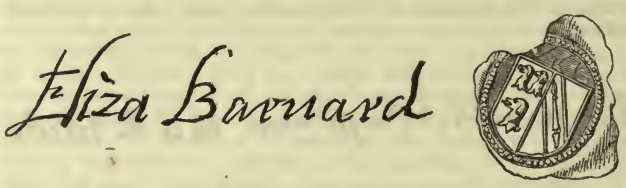
"WITTY ABOVE HER SEXE, BUT THAT'S NOT ALL,
WISE TO SALVATION WAS GOOD MISTRIS HALL,
SOMETHING OF SHAKESPEARE WAS IN THAT, BUT THIS
WHOLLY OF HIM WITH WHOM SHE'S NOW IN BLISSE.

THEN PASSENGER, HA'ST NE'RE A TEARE,
TO WEEPE WITH HER THAT WEPT WITH ALL?
THAT WEPT, YET SET HERSELF TO CHERE
THEM UP WITH COMFORTS CORDIALL.
HER LOVE SHALL LIVE, HER MERCY SPREAD,
WHEN THOU HAST NE'RE A TEARE TO SHED."

Judith, the second daughter of Shakspere, lived till 1662. She was buried on the 9th of February of that year:



Her married life must have been one of constant affliction in the bereavement of her children. Her first son, who was named Shakspere, was born in November, 1616, and died in May, 1617. Her second son, Richard, was born in February, 1618, and died in February, 1639. Her third son, Thomas, was born in August, 1619, and died in January, 1639. Thus perished all of the second branch of the heirs male of William Shakspere. His grand-daughter Elizabeth, the only child of his daughter Susanna, was married in 1626, when she was eighteen years of age, to Mr. Thomas Nash, a native of Stratford. He died in 1647, leaving no children. She remained a widow about two years, having married, on the 5th of June, 1649, Mr. John Barnard, of Abington, near Northampton. He was a widower, with a large family. They were married at Billesley, near Stratford. Her husband was created a knight by Charles II., in 1661. The grand-daughter of Shakspere died in February, 1670, and was buried at Abington. Her signature, with a seal, the same as that used by her mother,—the arms of Hall impaled with those of Shakspere, is affixed to a deed of appointment in the possession of Mr. Wheler of Stratford. She left no issue.



We have seen that all the sons of Judith Quiney were dead at the commencement of 1639. Shakspere's elder daughter and grand-daughter were therefore at liberty to treat the property as their own by the usual processes of law. The mode in which they, in the first instance, made it subservient to their family arrangements is thus clearly stated by Mr. Wheler, in an interesting tract on the birth-place of Shakspere: "By a deed of the 27th of May, 1639, and a fine and recovery (Trinity and Michaelmas Terms, 15th Charles 1st), Mrs. Susannah Hall, Shakspere's eldest daughter, with Thomas Nash, Esq., and Elizabeth his wife, (Mrs. Hall's only child), confirmed this and our bard's other estates to Mrs. Hall for her life, and afterwards settled them upon Mr. and Mrs. Nash, and her issue; but in the event of her leaving no family, then upon Mr. Nash. As, however, Mr. Nash died 4th April, 1647, without issue, a resettlement of the property was immediately adopted, to prevent its falling to the heir of Mr. Nash, who had, by his will of the 26th of August, 1642, devised his reversionary interest in the principal part of Shakspere's estates to his cousin Edward Nash. By a subsequent settlement, therefore, of the 2nd of June, 1647, and by another fine and recovery (Easter and Michaelmas Terms, 23rd Charles 1st), Shakspere's natal place and his other estates were again

limited to the bard's descendants, restoring to Mrs. Nash the ultimate power over the property." Upon the second marriage of Shakspere's grand-daughter other arrangements were made, in the usual form of fine and recovery, by which New Place, and all the other property which she inherited of William Shakspere, her grandfather, were settled to the use of John Barnard and Elizabeth his wife, for the term of their natural lives; then to the heirs of the said Elizabeth; and in default of such issue to the use of such person, and for such estate, as the said Elizabeth shall appoint by any writing, either purporting to be her last will or otherwise. She did make her last will on the 29th of January, 1669; according to which, after the death of Sir John Barnard, the property was to be sold. Thus, in half a century, the estates of Shakspere were scattered and went out of his family, with the exception of the two houses in Henley Street, where he is held to have been born, which Lady Barnard devised to her kinsman Thomas Hart, the grandson of Shakspere's sister Joan. Those who are curious to trace the continuity of the line of the Harts will find very copious extracts from the Stratford registers in Boswell's edition of Malone.

III.—THE AUTOGRAPHS OF SHAKSPERE.

The will of William Shakspere, preserved in the Prerogative Office, Doctors' Commons, is written upon three sheets of paper. The name is subscribed at the right-hand corner of the first sheet; at the left-hand corner of the second sheet; and immediately before the names of the witnesses upon the third sheet. These signatures, engraved from a tracing by Steevens, were first published in 1778. The first signature has been much damaged since it was originally traced by Steevens. It was for a long time thought that in the first and second of these signatures the poet had written his name *Shakspere*, but in the third *Shakspeare;* and Steevens and Malone held, therefore, that they had authority in the handwriting of the poet for uniformly spelling his name *Shakspeare*. They rested this mode of spelling the name not upon the mode in which it was usually printed during the poet's life, and especially in the genuine editions of his own works, which mode was *Shakespeare*, but upon this signature to the last sheet of his will, which they fancied contained an *a* in the last syllable. When William Henry Ireland, in 1795, produced his "Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments," it was necessary that he should fabricate Shakspere's name, and the engraving published by Steevens enabled him to do so. He varied the spelling, as he found it said to be varied in the signatures to the will; but he more commonly spelt the name with the *a* in the final syllable. His confidence in the Shakspere editors supplied one of the means for his detection. Malone, in his "Inquiry," published in 1796, has a confession upon this subject, which is almost as curious as any of Ireland's own confessions: "In the year 1776 Mr. Steevens, in my presence, traced with the utmost accuracy the three signatures affixed by the poet to his will. While two of these manifestly appeared to us Shakspere, we conceived that in the third there was a variation; and that in the second syllable an *a* was found. *Accordingly we have constantly so exhibited the poet's name ever since that time.* It ought certainly to have struck us as a very extraordinary circumstance, that a man should write his name twice one way, and once another, on the same paper: however, it did not; and I had no suspicion of our mistake till, about three years ago, I received a very sensible letter from an anonymous correspondent, who showed me very clearly that, though there was a superfluous stroke when the poet came to write the letter *r* in his last signature, probably from the tremor of his hand, there was no *a* discoverable in that syllable; and that this name, like both the other, was witten 'Shakspere." Revolving this matter in my mind, *it occurred to me, that in the new fac-simile of his name which I gave in* 1790, *my engraver had made a mistake in placing an* a *over the name which was there exhibited*, and that what was supposed to be that letter was only a mark of abbre-

viation, with a turn or curl at the first part of it, which gave it the appearance of a letter. . . . . If Mr. Steevens and I had maliciously intended to lay a trap for this fabricator to fall into, we could not have done the business more adroitly." The new fac-simile to which Malone here alludes continued to be given with the *a* over the name, in subsequent editions; and we have no alternative now but to copy it from the engraving. It was taken from the mortgage deed executed by Shakspere on the 11th of March, 1613. When Malone's engraver added to that signature an *a*, the deed was in the possession of Mr. Albany Wallis, a solicitor. It was subsequently presented to Garrick; but after his death was nowhere to be found. Malone, however, traced that the counterpart of the deed of bargain and sale, dated the 10th of March, 1613, was also in the possession of Mr. Wallis; and he corrected his former error by engraving the signature to that deed in his "Inquiry." He says, "Notwithstanding this authority, I shall continue to write our poet's name *Shakspeare*, for reasons which I have assigned in his Life. But whether in doing so I am right or wrong, it is manifest that he wrote it himself *Shakspere;* and therefore if any original Letter or other MS. of his shall ever be discovered, his name will appear in that form." This prophecy has been partially realized. The autograph of Shakspere, corresponding in its orthography with the other documents, was found in a small folio volume, the first edition of Florio's translation of Montaigne, having been sixty years in the possession of the Rev. Edward Patteson, minister of Smethwick, near Birmingham. In 1838 the volume was sold by auction, and purchased by the British Museum for one hundred pounds. The deed of bargain and sale, the signature of which was copied by Malone in 1796, was sold by auction in 1841, and was purchased by the Corporation of London for one hundred and forty-five pounds. The purchase was afterwards denounced in Court of Common Council as "a most wasteful and prodigal expenditure;" but it was defended upon the ground that "it was not very likely that the purchase of the autograph would be acted upon as a precedent, for Shakspere stood alone in the history of the literature of the world." Honoured be those who have thus shown a reverence for the name of Shakspere! It is a symptom of returning health in the Corporation of London, after a long plethora, which might have ended in sudden death. If the altered spirit of the majority is willing thus to reverence the symbol of the highest literature in Shakspere's autograph, that spirit will lead to a wise employment of the civic riches, in the encouragement of intellectual efforts in their own day.

We have given as a frontispiece fac-similes of the six authentic autographs of Shakspere. That at the head of the page is from the Montaigne of Florio; the left, with the seal, is from the counterpart of the Conveyance in the possession of the Corporation of London; the right, with the seal, is from Malone's fac-simile of the Mortgage-deed which has been lost; the three others are from the three sheets of the Will.

IV.—STRATFORD REGISTERS.

BAPTISMS.

1558 Septēber 15 ..... Jone Shakspere daughter to John Shakspere.
1562 December 2..... Margareta filia Johannis Shakspere.
1564 April 26 ..... Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere.
1566 October 13 ..... Gilbertus filius Johannis Shakspere.
1569 April 15 ..... Ione the daughter of John Shakspere.
1571 Septēb 28 ..... Anna filia Magistri Shakspere.
1573 [1573-4] March 11 ... Richard sonne to Mr. John Shakspeer.
1580 May 3 ..... Edmund sonne to Mr. John Shakspere.
1583 May 26 ..... Susanna daughter to William Shakspere.
1584 [1584-5] February 2.. Hamnet & Iudeth sonne & daughter to Williā Shakspere.

*** There are then entries of Ursula, 1588; Humphrey, 1590; Philippus, 1591;—children of John Shakspere (not *Mr.*)

MARRIAGES.

1607 Junii 5 ..... John Hall gentlemā & Susanna Shaxspere.
1615 [1615-6] February 10. Tho: Queeny tow Judith Shakspere.

BURIALS.

1563 April 30 ..... Margaret filia Johannis Shakspere.
1579 April 4 ..... Anne daughter to Mr. John Shakspere.
1596 August 11 ..... Hamnet filius William Shakspere.
1601 Septemb 8 ..... Mr. Johānes Shakspeare.
1608 Sept 9 ..... Mayry Shaxspere, Widowe.
1612 [1612-13] February 4. Rich. Shakspeare.
1616 April 25 ..... Will: Shakspere, Gent.
1623 August 8 ..... Mrs. Shakspeare.
1649 July 16 ..... Mrs. Susanna Hall, Widow.
1661 [1661-2] Feb. 9 ..... Judith uxor Thomas Quiney.

*** It appears by the Register of Burials that Dr. Hall, one of the sons-in-law of William Shakspere, was buried on the 26th November, 1635. He is described in the entry as "Medicus peritissimus." The Register contains no entry of the burial of Thomas Quiney. Elizabeth, the daughter of John and Susanna Hall, was baptized February 21, 1607 [1607-8]; and she is mentioned in her illustrious grandfather's will. The children of Judith, who was only married two months before the death of her father, appear to have been three sons, all of whom died before their mother.

V.—THE PORTRAITS OF SHAKSPERE.

VOLUMES have been written on the subject of the genuineness of Shakspere's portraits. The bust upon Shakspere's Monument has the first claim to notice. The sculptor of that monument was Gerard Johnson. The tomb itself is accurately represented at the head of Shakspere's Will. We learn the name of the sculptor from Dugdale's correspondence, published by Mr. Hamper in 1827; and we collect from the verses by Leonard Digges, prefixed to the first edition of Shakspere, that it was erected previous to 1623:—

> "Shakespeare, at length thy pious fellows give
> The world thy works: thy works by which outlive
> Thy tomb thy name must: when that stone is rent,
> And time dissolves thy Stratford monument,
> Here we alive shall view thee still. This book,
> When brass and marble fade, shall make thee look
> Fresh to all ages."

The fate of this portrait of Shakspere, for we may well account it as such, is a singular one. Mr. Britton, who has on many occasions manifested an enthusiastic feeling for the associations belonging to the great poet, published in 1816 "Remarks on his Monumental Bust," from which we extract the following passage:—"The Bust is the size of life; it is formed out of a block of soft stone; and was originally painted over in imitation of nature. The hands and face were of flesh colour, the eyes of a light hazel, and the hair and beard auburn; the doublet or coat was scarlet, and covered with a loose black gown, or tabard, without sleeves; the upper part of the cushion was green, the under half crimson, and the tassels gilt. Such appear to have been the original features of this important but neglected or insulted bust. After remaining in this state above one hundred and twenty years, Mr. John Ward, grandfather to Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kemble, caused it to be 'repaired,' and the original colours preserved, in 1748, from the profits of the representation of 'Othello.' This was a generous, and apparently judicious act; and therefore very unlike the next alteration it was subjected to in 1793. In that year Mr. Malone caused the bust to be covered over with one or more coats of white paint; and thus at once destroyed its original character, and greatly injured the expression of the face." It is fortunate that we live in an age when no such unscrupulous insolence as that of Malone can be again tolerated.

A small head, engraved from the little print, by WILLIAM MARSHALL, prefixed to the edition of Shakspere's poems in 1640, is considered amongst the genuine portraits of Shakspere. It is probably reduced, with alterations, from the print by MARTIN DROESHOUT, which is prefixed to the folio of 1623. The original engraving is not a good one; and as the plate furnished the portraits to three subsequent editions, it is not easy to find a good impression. The persons who published this portrait were the friends of Shakspere. It was published at a time when his features would be well recollected by many of his contemporaries. The accuracy of the resemblance is also attested by the following lines from the pen of Ben Jonson:—

> "This figure, that thou here seest put,
> It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
> Wherein the graver had a strife
> With Nature, to outdo the life:
> O, could he but have drawn his wit
> As well in brass, as he had hit
> His face, the print would then surpass
> All that was ever writ in brass.
> But, since he cannot, Reader, look
> Not on his Picture, but his Book."—B. J.

Under these circumstances we are inclined to regard it as the most genuine of the portraits of Shakspere. It wants that high art which seizes upon a likeness by general resemblance, and not through the merely accurate delineation of features. The draughtsman from whom this engraving was made, and the sculptor of the bust at Stratford, were literal copyists. It is perfectly clear that they were working upon the same original.

The famous CHANDOS picture, is now the property of the Earl of Ellesmere; and has recently been engraved for the "Shakespeare Society," by Mr. Cousens. It has a history belonging to it which says much for its authenticity. It formerly belonged to Davenant, and afterwards to Betterton. When in Betterton's possession it was engraved for Rowe's edition of Shakspere's works. It subsequently passed into various hands; during which transit it was engraved, first by Vertue and afterwards by Houbraken. It became the property of the Duke of Chandos, by marriage; and thence descended to the Buckingham family. Kneller copied this portrait for Dryden, and the poet addressed to the painter the following verses as a return for the gift:*—

"Shakspeare, thy gift, I place before my sight,
With awe I ask his blessing as I write;
With reverence look on his majestic face,
Proud to be less, but of his godlike race.
His soul inspires me, while thy praise I write,
And I like Teucer under Ajax fight:
Bids thee, through me, be bold; with dauntless breast
Contemn the bad, and emulate the best:
Like his, thy critics in the attempt are lost,
When most they rail, know then, they envy most."

Of a portrait, said to have been painted by CORNELIUS JANSEN, an engraving was made by Earlom, and was prefixed to an edition of "King Lear," published in 1770, edited by Mr. Jennens. It has subsequently been more carefully engraved by Mr. Turner, for Mr. Boaden's "Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Portraits of Shakspere." This portrait has the inscription "Æ^te 46, 1610;" and in a scroll over the head are the words "Ut. Magus." Mr. Boaden says, "The two words are extracted from the famous Epistle of Horace to Augustus, the First of the Second Book; the particular passage this:—

'Ille per *extentum funem* mihi posse videtur
Ire poeta; meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
Ut Magus; et modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.'

No man ever took this 'extended range' more securely than Shakspere; no man ever possessed so ample a control over the passions; and he transported his hearers, 'as a magician,' over lands and seas, from one kingdom to another, superior to all circumspection or confine." The picture passed from the possession of Mr. Jennens into that of the Duke of Somerset.

The five miniature-portraits of Shakspere, forming the frontispiece to the "Studies of Shakspere," are taken from the following authorities:—*top, left*—The Chandos Picture, now in the possession of the Earl of Ellesmere;—*top, right*—Droeshout's Print, prefixed to the folio of 1623;—*centre*—The Bust at Stratford, as drawn by the late Mr. Phillips, R.A., and engraved under the direction of Mr. Britton;—*bottom, left*—Mr. Nicol's Picture, of which there is an engraving;—*bottom, right*—An Ancient Picture (with the panel frame of the wainscot in which it was inserted), in the possession of Mr. Knight.

* This picture, by permission of the late Duke of Buckingham, was copied for the engraving in the "Gallery of Portraits," for the first time for forty years; and the copy, by Mr. Witherington, R. A. is in our possession.

[THE END.]

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